



Asian Trash Cinema

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Director **JOHN WOO**

SEE PAGE 22



photos courtesy of Sulev Institute of The Arts



Asian Trash Cinema

Co-Editors: Craig Ledbetter and Tom Weisser ★ Design/Artwork: Francine Dai

Editorial

from CRAIG LEDBETTER

Before I get into this issue's specifics, let me make a few corrections for previous editions. Apologies and thanks go to S.C.Dacy for the photo of Yukari Oshima used on page 34 of ATC #1. Also, for ATC 2, in John Grace's review of GOD OF GAMBLERS 3 on page 16, third paragraph, the next to last sentence should read: "The twist here is that the poor girl has the mentality of a six year old." Sorry John.

ATC 3 continues the mix of Hong Kong and Japanese film coverage. Chris D. begins his exhaustive survey on the Yakuza films, a genre I've always wanted to know more about. Chris has other long range writing plans after the conclusion of his three part series for ATC that includes coverage of the ZATOICHI films (which I'm sure, if more people knew about them, they would replace current fave LONE WOLF AND CUB).

This issue has an excellent review of the new John Woo film, HARDBOILED, by Erik Sulev. Those of you might not be aware that Erik runs a video company called WHITE DRAGON. For a catalogue of the pre-records he carries write to him at 46 Tweedrock Crescent, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada M1E 4L5.

Travis Crawford, with his review of THE STORY OF RICKY, reminds us why Hong Kong genre films are unlike those from any other country. The film mixes high speed action with over-the-top gore for the best of both worlds. Alex Simmons also debuts this issue with a detailed look at the Japanese "Girls with Yo-Yos" film, SUKEBAN DEKA. ATC was made for exposing a film like this to fans. Let me know if you agree.

Finally, Godzilla coverage debuts this issue and will most likely be a mainstay each issue. His appeal is timeless and with yet another film (involving a revamped Mothra) on the horizon, Godzilla appears to be an ongoing filmic event once again. We hope to have coverage of that new film next issue.



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LETTERS

To the Editors of ATC:

I know you won't print this letter. You don't have the guts! It certainly isn't in your best interests, but I'm writing anyway. I want you to know that I'm aware of your bullshit conspiracy and I think everybody else should be.

Your magazines (*Asian Trash Cinema* and *European Trash Cinema*) are biased. They are one-dimensional. One-sided. They exist only to promote and advertise *Video Search Of Miami*. I know that editor/publisher Tom Weisser is secretly the head of *Video Search* and he hides behind the alias, Pompano Joe Torrez! So fuck you!

*Anonymous

Whew! I hope you feel better now.

Some of what you write is true. I do own *Video Search Of Miami* and I have used the pseudonym Pompano Joe Torrez (among many others). I'm not ashamed of my association with *VSoM*, rather... the opposite. I'm very proud of it and the service we offer. But this is certainly no big news, and it's definitely not a "conspiracy."

Regarding the "alias." This was a practical solution to some problems I encountered while teaching at Miami Dade University. It seems that the conservative college didn't want one of "their" professors to be involved with a publication like *ETC* (and this one). Not to mention a "sleazy" video mail-order company. So Pompano was born. Today he's still part of me.

But I totally object to your vicious accusation concerning the integrity of *ETC* and *ATC*. Is it possible that you've never read the magazines? Craig and I love the genre, but we don't "rubber-stamp" the films. In these pages you'll find both good and bad reviews. And many times I don't agree with what the writer has to say (i.e., Jeff Smith's article on *Godzilla Vs King Ghidorah* in this issue, or Craig's review for *Cat In The Hat*

in the most recent *ETC*), but I don't censor the material in any way. I would never compromise my friendship with Craig, especially over something so insignificant.

Thankfully, *VSoM* is a successful operation, and as a result, I have the extra funds to invest in Craig's magazines, which (hopefully) has resulted in the publishing of the most professional-looking publication possible. But the editorial policies of both magazines remain exclusively that of Craig. They are not biased. Nor one-sided. They are uniquely Craig.

And, by the way, he is the best friend I've ever had.

So, now... get a life!

Dear ATC --

I received my copy of *ATC* a couple of weeks ago, but due to my work on *SKAM*, was unable to promptly draft an appropriate response to the issue. Since I have a minute or two available now, let me try to sum up my feelings about the issue. First, the cover was an offbeat, but quite effective choice. Definitely not the kind of graphic you expect to see under the *ASIAN TRASH CINEMA* heading. I have no idea what film it's from but that's what makes it all the more intriguing (Then we won't tell you it's from *Deep Throat In Tokyo*, Ed.)

The back cover was... well what can I say? Evelynne Kraft, *ETC*'s Rosalba Neri and now this? Your zine is going to become as famous for it's back covers as it is for its contents.

The "letters page" was great stuff. It's good to know that there is a diverse community of fans out there for *Asian Cinema*. Tom Weisser's closing response to S.C.Dacy's letter was a brief but highly appropriate rebuttal. If Dacy is so upset by the seeming lack of knowledge on the

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part of Asian Cinema fanzines, then he is certainly welcome to start his own.

The reviews as usual were all very well written and informative. I have to say that I agreed with almost everything the reviewers had to say. It's always great to read something by Jeff Segal.

Tom Weisser's *Urotsukidoji* plot summary was very welcome. I have a copy of that unsubtitled/undubbed movie on tape, but it had been mostly gathering dust until I saw Tom's piece. The interpretation of the film's events helped to rejuvenate my interest in that remarkably deranged animation. I eagerly await part two of Tom's translation. {Unfortunately, I was unable to write much for this issue of ATC, in particular Part 2 of *Urotsukidoji* due to the chaos caused in my hometown by Hurricane Andrew, truly a 20 Billion Dollar Blow Job. Hopefully, I'll continue that series in the next issue. In the meantime, I'm sending you a copy of a subtitled version we're offering through Video Search Of Miami. Okay? -Editor Tom}.

Regarding your inquiry as to whether concentrate more on Japanese cinema or Chinese cinema I liked ATC #2's mix and would like to see the same kind of balance in future issues. Hong Kong cinema gets heavy coverage in fanzines today and the less explored Japanese Trash Cinema could benefit from the exposure in ATC's pages (as evidenced by Robert Sargent's excellent *Hanzo The Blade* piece). And of course don't forget Korea, the Philippines, etc.

I am looking forward with great anticipation to ATC #3 and ETC #7 (especially the back covers).

Best Regards,
*Richard A. Akiyama

Dear ATC folks -

Just got your first 2 issues. Great job! Even though I also have *Naked Screaming Terror* #4/5 (the groundbreaking issue), I quite enjoyed ATC's expansion of *The Dead and The Deadly*. Your review of *Crazy Safari* was right on the money!

ATC #2 was a change of pace from the information over-load of #1. Concerning "Baby Cart" films, is there a chance of reviewing the others in the series?

*Tim Driscoll

We hope to cover the additional *Baby Cart* films in future issues. And thanks for the kind words.

Dear ATC:

I'm speechless! I just received ATC #2 and I can't tear my eyes away from the back cover. McLaren Lu! Now she's a true Asian beauty! But you guys neglected to give us any kind of filmography on her. What movies has she been in? Do you have any more photos of her? Can you print them? Help!

And has Amy Yip ever done a nude scene in a film? She gets my blood boiling! Have you considered her for your back cover?

Panting in Peoria,

*George Lambert

How could we be so inconsiderate? Let's set the record straight. According to our information, McLaren Lu has starred in only one film: *Ghost Story Of Kempin Mu*. And yes, she sheds her clothes without much prompting. Here's another shot of that Hong Kong starlet:



Apparently, Amy Yip is more modest. We know of only one nude scene featuring the busty Hong Kong star, and that's in *Sex And Zen*. We'd love to put her on the back cover, but it'll have to wait until ATC goes "full size."

Dear Tom:

Regarding ATC #1, an excellent job., particularly due to the incredible Evelyn Kraf photo on the back cover! I think you're a little too hard on Jackie Chan. And maybe too easy on alot of overly-derivative blood-n-ghost fests.

After seeing the 4 stars (****) awarded to *Venus: Wolf Ninja*, I decided to check it out. Pretty lame, I thought -- watchable at best, but 4 stars?! As you admit, you're no Martial Arts fan. But you're not a very discriminating reviewer either. You probably liked this movie for entirely different reason from my dislike, wincing as I did during every sloppy sword battle.

*Greg Javer

You are absolutely correct! My love for *Venus Wolf Ninja (Matching Escort)* has nothing to do with the sword battles! It has to do with the star, Pearl Cheung/Chang Ling. I'm thinking of starting a church in her honor.

Craig and Tom:

Loved the first issue of ATC and the second was even better! By all means keep the letters column fat! With the way Asian films are distributed, hardly anyone ever sees the same film. Correction should not be a surprise to anyone, but rather an ongoing necessity.

I've seen different versions of several films with scenes dropped and add and different dubbing, so whenever possible the reviewer should mention the source of the film. I know that it would be difficult, but could we stick with one name for each actor/actress? Pearl Cheung, Pearl Cheung, Chang Ling...when you have to remember three names for each person it gets confusing. I don't have an answer to how, but it sure would be easier.

And speaking of Pearl Cheung: this wonderful actress also makes an appearance in *Fantasy Mission Force* along with the equally wonderful Bridget Lin, Venus Lin, etc. And, in my copy of Pearl's *Dark Lady Of The Butterfly*, the scene where she is captured is missing. Does any one have a copy with this scene intact?

Keep up the great work!

*John G. Auker

Incidentally, John, we just ran across a "previously unknown" Pearl Cheung/Chang Ling film called *Miracle Of The Crystal Rose*. I'd guess you've already added it to your collection. Right? And we agree, she's the greatest!

Craig and Tom:

More problems regarding the *In The Line Of Duty Series* (as discussed in ATC #1 and #2). *Royal Warriors* is the Japanese title of *In The Line Of Duty #1*, but this first movie isn't really the first. The first one is actually #2, released, for unknown motivations, after #1. Confusing?

There's more! A new company (the same people who produced *Men Behind The Sun*) have announced *Part 6* and *7* in the series. But, to avoid legal problems, they will be calling it *In Line Of Duty* (dropping the *The* from the title).

*Max Della Mora

Dear ATC --

Have you heard the news? Japan is no longer digitally censoring the nudity in their films. According to an article in last week's *Variety*, the film industry in that country has voted to stop the self-imposed censoring of nudity and "public hair." How wonderful!

*Gilbert Hayes

This is great news. It will be interesting to see what the ramifications are. Does this mean the video companies are going to go back and re-master all the "censored" films? What will happen to the video tapes and Laserdiscs in the marketplace? And will the consumers be able to exchange the former purchases for the non-censored version? Very interesting, indeed.

Dear Editor(s)

I just picked up your wonderful magazine. It's a true enjoyment. First and foremost, everybody involved in this fanzine are not hack writers, but rather, informed fans of the genre.

I have a couple questions, which if possible, I need answered. 1) Will you be covering older Martial Arts Films and/or Yakuza films? (Check out the incredible (Part 1) Yakuza article in this very issue! Ed.)

2) Would it be possible to have a Video Section that lists not only directors and producers, but also the Video Releasing Company, minutes, and cut or restored scenes missing from the movie (Possible but not particularly practical, Ed.)

3) And how about an annual vote for best Asian movie? I know ATC is just starting, but I want it to remain the best! I also have a name for your "letters page" -- The Chopping Board. (Mmmm? How about "Letters"? Ed.)

Yours truly,

*T.E.Crash

Reviews

BURNING AMBITION

(1989)

DIRECTED BY FRANKIE CHAN

REVIEWED BY JOHN GRACE

BURNING AMBITION is another one of Frankie Chan's uneven actioners. While he is excellent at playing either a hero (as in this film) or villain (in Samo Hung's **THE PRODIGAL SON**), his work as a director has been mixed (previous directorial efforts include **THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE BEAUTIFUL** and **THE CRIMINAL HUNTER**). With **BURNING AMBITION**, Chan has included three exhilarating (but preposterous) kung-fu fights that save this crime drama from being a complete waste of time. The performances of Yukari Oshima, Hui Ying Hung and Simon Yam also help.

It would be a waste of space if I gave you a complete plot synopsis. Besides, with all the twists and surprises (not to mention the fact that several characters are snuffed out before the finale), regurgitating the plot would ruin your enjoyment of this film. So, I'll review what really counts, the mind-boggling action scenes!

A Triad boss (Roy Chiao, of **INDIANA JONES AND THE TEMPLE OF DOOM**) allows his youngest son (Simon Yam) to inherit the family business. This pisses off the eldest son, so Number One Son and his equally pissed Uncle start a family war, getting the rebellious middle son (Chan) and his sister (Oshima) in on the action. That's all you need to know. Now to the good part, the fight reviews:

FIGHT #1 - Yukari Oshima and Hui Ying Hung battle dozens of henchmen in an underground parking lot. Ms Oshima wields a baseball bat, while Hung fights with broken glass embedded in her foot! To be honest, Hung (a veteran of many Shaw Brothers films) outshines New Wave starlet Oshima. Her kicking style and acrobatics are flashier, more precise and more impressive. This is the best fight in the entire movie.

FIGHT #2 - Frankie and his gang from Holland (?) brawl with a lot of evil cousins in a casino. Frankie gets to strut his stuff, while Oshima also gets to kill a bad uncle.

FIGHT #3 - Frankie and friends have an impressive weapons fight with Jeff Falcon

(**BLONDE FURY**, **INSPECTOR WEARS SKIRTS**, and many others), John Ladalski (**ARMOUR OF GOD**) and Gary Mintz. Falcon plays a hot-headed Caucasian hitman trying to prove he's better at kung-fu than the Chinese. Frankie wields a rope dart against Falcon's tri-sectional staff (sort of a triple nunchucks). Some imaginative camera angles and rapid, quick-cut editing make this one of the sharpest displays of wushu in a HK film.

MIDNIGHT ANGEL

(1989)

DIRECTED BY CHIK KI YEE

REVIEWED BY MIKE ACCOMANDO

This Asian actioner packs more punch than a shot of Jack Daniels. Slow going at first (with some admittedly silly humor), patient viewers will be rewarded with some roaring set-pieces of excitement. **MIDNIGHT ANGELS** works on two levels, as a joyous satire of masked superheroes and as a dynamic shoot'em up.

Ying (Yukari Oshima), Cherry, and Rabbit (May Law) are three sexy sisters who also happen to be policewomen. They're out to nail a grotty drug dealer named Bull, whose gang likes to harpoon cops and drag them behind motorcycles. After Ying sees her boyfriend barbecued like a spare rib by Bull, she vows revenge. Meanwhile, youngest sister Rabbit, tired of being treated like a child, dons a mask and becomes "Cotton Flower", defender of justice! The scenes of her saving babies and beating the shit out of muggers will have you roaring. Although I could do without the scene where a no good lout abuses his VERY pregnant wife by kicking her in the stomach and dragging her around by the hair. Even though Cotton Flower skateboards up and pummels him (including the obligatory kick in the nuts), this was a bit too much and ruined the fun of the sequence.

When Ying learns that baby sis is making like Batgirl, they have a knockdown catfight. Bull and his troops stage an attack on our three heroines' home and we witness some gonzo gunplay. After their Grandfather is shot, all THREE girls don super-hero garb and meet Bull and his scummy gang (which includes women) on the docks for a Battle Royale!

The climax is worth the price of admission alone as characters leap about in the air like they were fueled on helium. Needless to say, these women kick ass (as well as faces, heads and stomachs). Oshima is pretty devastating. When she fights, Oshima she gets this scary, intense look in her eyes. She's kind of like the female Steven Seagal (although she'd probably kill him). I love the fact that the men in this film can't outwit livestock and the women are vastly superior.

MIDNIGHT ANGELS resembles a live-action cartoon. It's like Chinese food, after you see one, you'll be hungry again for more.

...and from Italy:

3 REVIEWS

BY MAX DELLA MORA



SHAITANI ILAAKA

(1990) INDIA

DIRECTED BY KIRAN RAMSAY

The first part of **SHAITANI ILAAKA** concerns a maid who is a vile, screaming witch attempting to put a spell on a young woman, herself destined to become an offering to an Evil Spirit. When the woman's mother fires a bullet into the maid's head, the witch turns into a scary, dark skinned demoness who ends up getting electrocuted in their swimming pool. The young woman takes a vacation along with a group of her friends to an old palace (during the voyage, there are many occasions for the typical songs and dances found in Indian films). Once there, a guy is possessed by the still alive witch.

When a young monk on the scene intervenes, the guy regurgitates the witch who then takes the form of a hawk and is captured in a basket. The witch is freed from the trap by a prospective thief and re-engages a battle royale with the monk. During the fight, each opponent bites off pieces of their adversary's flesh resulting in copious amounts of gore. After all this, the monk defeats the witch only to have his head removed by a giant Yeti-like monster! The Yeti goes on to attack a local village and ends up perishing in an earthquake caused by a statue that contains the spirit of good within it.

The best part of this film occurs near the beginning (In a scene that is ripped off from **EVIL DEAD 2** where a man is killed by his own dismembered hand which smashes dinner

plates over his head), however the rest of the film is quite boring. It improves near the end when the Yeti-like creature tears people apart, but not enough to justify its 2 hour running time.

DISCARNATES

(1988) JAPANESE

DIRECTOR NOBUHIKO OBAYASHI

A man goes to visit the village where his parent's are buried and to his amazement, finds them alive, looking just as they did before their fatal car crash. They realize they are dead but continue to treat him with love and kindness, despite their physical condition. Even though he is slowly beginning to resemble one of the walking dead, he finds he can't leave. There is also a subplot involving a lady ghost who committed suicide (the only scene in the movie that involves graphic blood spurring, it seems out of place here), but it doesn't really affect the main story line. This poetic film is well directed, intelligent fare.

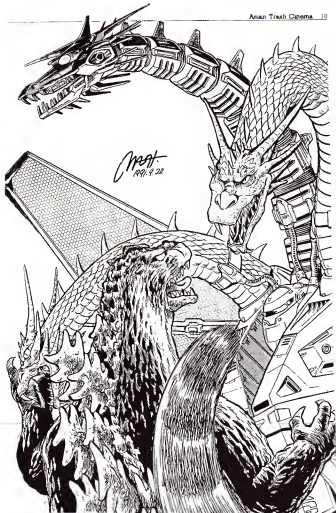
SATAN'S BED

(1988) INDONESIA

DIRECTED BY CUT JALIL

A Dutch family is killed and on top of their graves is built a house. The new arrivals soon begin to experience all types of weird goings on. One of the youngsters, Maria, suffers from terrible nightmares, including a scene worthy of Italian hack Andrea Bianchi, involving a zombie who wears a Freddy Kruger-like glove of knives. These dreams are ripoffs of the first movie in the **NIGHTMARE ON ELM STREET** saga, such as when the girl is attacked in her bathtub or when a friend levitates and is smashed against the ceiling of her room. When the local exorcist shows up, the film then switches gears to model that American horror film. At the film's climax, the Kruger clone battles a demonic woman resulting in both of their heads getting ripped off. The film's not over yet as the disembodied heads then bite the poor exorcist where the sun doesn't shine. A second exorcist destroys the evil spirits before anyone else is harmed. It's a shame the film steals so much from American movies as most Asian pictures are crammed full of originality.

{Most movies reviewed in ATC are available thru Video Search of Miami/PO Box 16-1917/Miami FL 33116. Send for a free catalog}



ゴジラVSキングギドラ

GODZILLA VS KING GHIDORA

reviewed by Jeff Smith

The King of Monsters is back for his 18th stomp through the miniature cities of Japan, and while it's always good to have Godzilla back, **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORA** is a dopey throwback to the mid-70s Godzilla films, updated with lighter action and eye-filling special effects. 1989's **GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE** was an attempt to make a serious "A" movie out of the rubber-suit monster-stomping that met with mixed reactions; sure, it was slow in spots, but it had vivid imagery unmatched in any previous Godzilla film, as well as a new monster for the Zillaged to battle. **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORA** is a bit of a step backward, an obvious effort to appeal to a wider (i.e., younger) audience; but what it lacks in intelligent scripting, it at least makes up for in vigorous, bring-down-the-house action.

Written and directed by Kazuki Omori - who also helmed **GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE** - **KING GHIDORA** takes place one thousand days after the previous film. Panic grips Japan as a glittering flying saucer soars through the night sky. Its crew claims that they are from two hundred years in the future, and they wish to save Japan from future destruction by Godzilla, by going back to 1944 and Lagos Island, where Godzilla - then just an ordinary dinosaur - was hit by a hydrogen blast and mutated into a monster; by removing him before the mutation occurs, they eradicate Godzilla from history. But the future people have hidden motives, and leave three small winged creatures of their own, which are in turn bombarded by the radiation and become King Ghidorah, the winged, three-headed beast that first appeared in **THE GREATEST BATTLE ON EARTH** (1954; American title: **GHIDRAH, THE THREE-HEADED MONSTER**).

The people from the future can now control Ghidorah and use him to destroy various Japanese landmarks. A new and improved Godzilla shows up - this time created by modern nuclear waste - and stomps Ghidorah, only to turn on Tokyo and begin tearing the city apart. Emil, a sympathetic future girl, returns there and revives Ghidorah, turning him into a

cyborg, and then brings it back to 1992 to battle Godzilla once again. Confused? There's also a sub-plot about a battalion of Japanese soldiers who were on Lagos Island in '44 and were saved from American troops by the pre-Zilla dinosaur; one of the surviving soldiers is now a wealthy industrialist who has brought prosperity to Japan.

The story is incredibly convoluted and just plain silly. Plot holes abound: Why do the future people stop in 1992 at all? Why not just go directly back to 1944 and accomplish their mission, without making a big production out of it? Also, once Ghidorah has been substituted for Godzilla, the Japanese government gets the bright idea to bombard the dinosaur (which the future people, for some reason, have teleported to the Bering Sea in 1992) with radiation to transform it-yet again-into Godzilla. This sequence is especially confusing; after discussing the possibility of nuking the dinosaur, reports come in that Godzilla has already mutated (the transformation occurs entirely off-screen) due to radiation that was-seemingly-already present in the Bering Sea. In his new form, Godzilla is "bigger than before" and able to absorb any radiation thrown at him. Although this sequence contains one of the film's most striking visuals-a beautiful shot of a submarine moving towards an immense, back-lit Godzilla-it is dramatically clumsy and needlessly obscure. Also, cyborg-izing Ghidorah seems an awfully roundabout way to defeat Godzilla. Surely some 23rd century technology could have been used to defeat the big lizard.

But after awhile you just give up on the film making any damn sense and enjoy the visuals. The production values are pretty high, generally on a level with **BIOLLANTE**, though they sometimes have a slightly cheesy look to them. Particularly impressive is the time-ship, an interesting two-level saucer design that always looks convincing, and King Ghidorah himself, in both his organic and mechanoid form. Also, the sequence with the pre-mutated dinosaur is impressively realistic, and is in fact more striking than any of Godzilla's later scenes, perffy

because the suit design is closer to that of the classic Godzilla of the '60s and '70s. The final Godzilla suit in this movie looks rather strange, with a huge, barrel chest that makes it look awkward and top-heavy. However, the miniature work, especially the Tokyo cityscape at the film's conclusion, is spectacular, some of the best ever seen in a Godzilla film. For once, Godzilla seems of a realistic scale, not towering over hundred-story buildings, and this gives the film unexpected power and tension.

The most interesting aspect of the script is its depiction of Japan as a world power to be reckoned with. Omorì extrapolates a future in which Japan's corporate structure has made it the leading world nation—"bigger than the United States or China"—and has become so aggressive that it must be destroyed! This says a lot about how the Japanese perceive themselves in the World market, and it should be noted that Americans are portrayed in the film as aggressive and stupid. During the Lagos Island segment we get blood-hungry Gile cravenly rejoicing at the (seeming) destruction of the dinosaur, and one officer states: "Looks like that island needs scientists more than American military people" (talco mine). Add to this, lingering shots of the slaughtered US soldiers, and the fact that all the American characters are portrayed by exceptionally bad actors, and you get a film with rather uncomfortable Japanese/American friction. And yet, the film is loaded with odd bits that seem put in to emulate American films (or at least appeal to an American audience, in the unlikely event this will ever get a US release).

The future people are aided by a TERMINATOR-like robot who, in one scene, has the skin ripped from his arm and part of his face, almost exactly as you-know-who in T2 (this robot's super-powers are depicted in a haphazard fashion, although one scene, a point-of-view shot of him running along a highway, resembles the pixilated stop-motion of TETSUOQ). Another time, a character shouts (in English, ever), "Make my day!" while setting off an explosion. And, in the worst, most embarrassing scene of the movie (during the 1944 sequence), two US naval officers, on the bow of their ship, witness the shooting-star-like arrival of the time-ship, and have the following exchange:

MAJOR: *Enemy plane sir?*

COLONEL: *Impossible. No plane can fly that*

fast. Looked like it was from another planet.

MAJOR: *Shall we report it sir?*

COLONEL: *What? That we're being invaded by little green men from outer space? Let's just keep it as our little secret. You can tell your son about it when he's born, Major Spielberg.*

Unfortunately, the Japan/American element is fairly minor (one might almost say subliminal) and is generally subjugated to the action scenario. All **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** really cares about is delivering a thrill-ride of an adventure. Anything else—characterization, subtext, logic—is of secondary consideration.

The large cast is competent, if unspectacular: Issa Toyohara is Teresawa, a freelance writer with an interest in Godzilla who is chosen to accompany the future people to 1944; Megumi Otake reprises her role as Miki Saegusa, a young psychic Godzilla expert, from **BIOLLANTE**; Yoshino Tsuchiya is the industrialist Shindo, who confronts a rampaging Godzilla in one of the film's best scenes; and gorgeous Anna Kakagawa is Emi, the soft-hearted future girl who just wants to preserve her heritage. Also in the cast is the venerable Shoji Kobayashi, who played Captain Mura in the classic **ULTRAMAN** series, and later appeared in **KAMEN RIDERS**.

The bombastic, old-fashioned score is by Akira Ifukube; it enhances the feeling that this film is a throwback to the older Godzilla films, and with good reason: Ifukube wrote the music for most of the previous Godzilla films. And while the **KING GHIDORAH** score lectures a few dashes of electronic music that has become popular in recent years, it mainly consist of the fat, full-orchestra sound with aggressive themes and lyrical tangents that have enhanced many of the earlier films in the series. And, thank heavens, there is no vocal theme song.

If you approach **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** in the right spirit—it's largely a nostalgia trip, harkening back to the days when Godzilla was a good guy—it's a great deal of fun. Although slow to get started, once Godzilla and Ghidorah begin to duke it out, it is some of the best-choreographed, most spectacular monster-stompin' ever seen in the series. Some purist may deem this entry childish and insulting, and while it's definitely a step down from **BIOLLANTE**, Godzilla has never been Shakespeare. As pure, mindless fun, **GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH** delivers the groceries.



SLEAZY RUBBER MONSTERS AND OTHER STORIES

by Max Della Mora

"From the depths of your oceans, Godzilla is coming!"

No, this is not the trailer for the next radioactive dinosaur episode, *GODZILLA VS TURDOMONGUS*, instead it's from the fake trailer for the hilarious *PORNOZILLA*. This 1987, 7 minute shot-on-video short was conceived by MEPI, aka Maurizio Arietti, ex-undertaker and free-lance actor (you can see him as the dentist in *MY LOVELY BURNT BROTHER AND HIS SQUISHED BRAIN*).

PORNOZILLA starts with a prowling camera travelling around a bathroom, where it stops at the commode. From the depths comes a growling plastic Godzilla toy, sans tail. "Terrific" appears on the screen and suddenly we see the King of Monsters fucking Gigan (he also appears without a tail, Freudian aficionados can

argue about this psycho-erotic tendency all they want) along with other giant monster toys. The two giants and their companions try every position in the Kama Sutra (including giving fellatio to the critter with his tail intact).

Then it's time for *GODZILLA VS BARBIE* as the big G banks the All-American doll while she lays on a bunch of tomatoes. A blowjob follows that features Godzilla coming in gallons (thanks to a plastic tube filled with oozy, green shampoo) all over her face.

Gigan joins the action and when the two goliathons climax, Barbie rubs her body in the green pool of shampoo sperm. On the soundtrack we get various "oohs" and "aahs" borrowed from a Marina Fojase porn flick and at the film's end we even get the obligatory X-rating.

Wild and original (even if shot in the crudest of fashion), the fact that you can see the hands of the guy "helping" the monsters to copulate only adds to the pornographic atmosphere. PORNOZILLA is perfect at parties and a must-see for any Godzilla fan.

However, this isn't the only "porno" appearance by Godzilla. Excluding a Japanese TV program where the atomic lizard visits a brothel and entertains himself with a geisha (you've got to see it to believe it), Godzilla appeared in the porno-horror-noir I WAS A TEENAGE ZABBADOING (1988) by Austrian Carl Andersen. During the final orgy of the "zabbadoings" (basically vampires) with their victims, an inflatable Godzilla doll appears between waves of flesh. And, lest we forget, Debbie Harry gave Godzilla a French Kiss in an ominous music video several years ago (lucky guy!).

On a more serious level, Godzilla made many other appearances in shorts, movies and TV series. It would be impossible to list them all here, so let me give you the details on the most interesting and obscure examples. Outside the official movie-series, Godzilla (or Gojira) appears in unofficial form in an episode of the ULTRA Q series (1986) under the name of GOMES. He's so made up, that you'll hardly recognize him, what with his long fangs, eyebrows (!) and other appliances glued to his suit (no doubt in desperate need of repair anyway).

Again incognito, Mr. G shows up in the tenth episode of a series which needs no introduction, ULTRAMAN (1966). Here, the being from Nebula M78 confronts JIRAS, a Godzilla-like creature with a big fin around his neck. Curiously, in the American version of this episode, he is called KIRA and the scene where Ultraman rips-off his fin is missing. Perhaps it was considered by the American TV censors as being too violent for a kiddie show.

Godzilla was a "special" guest in Toho's TV series RYUSEI NINGEN ZON (1973) where, complete with a poor-looking costume he battles, along with the series's hero ZONE FIGHTER, Gigan and other monsters. Strangely, this series was never released to the USA nor Europe.

Rather famous is the short GODZILLA MEETS BAMBI, a 1969 one minute cartoon made by Marv Newland, where Bambi gets squished by Godzilla's oversized feet. It played along with GODZILLA 1985 during that film's US release and even though it's not very good, at least it's

better than Hanna & Barbera's GODZILLA cartoons made in the seventies.

Much more obscure was MATT BLACKFINGER, a short video made by the mysterious Akko Kado. Toys are used rather than human actors and in the James Bond parody plot, a Godzilla wind-up toy stars as James Bond. At the end, all the toys are in bed with Bond/Godzilla and one of them says, "Oh Bond, you're a monster in bed.". German director Jorg Buttgeriet is a long time Godzilla fan and in his early short film HORROR HEAVEN, shot on Super-8, he creates his own Japanese giant called GAZZORA. With its intentionally bad stop-motion effects, a monster, who in no way resembles Godzilla (except for his name) battles toy tanks and destroys cities (their models at least). One other small note is the fact that Buttgeriet used the soundtrack to GODZILLA in a baby puking scene from another of his shorts, HOT LOVE.

More brief appearances include Joe Dante and Allan Arkush's HOLLYWOOD BOULEVARD (they credit Godzilla as a she on the poster!) and Tim Burton's PEE-WEE'S BIG ADVENTURE. In the latter, Pee-Wee disrupts a movie set which contains both Godzilla and Ghidrah.

Needless to say, in Japan Godzilla has been used in many amateur short films. One of the best is GOJIRA VS MITOKOHMON, a sort of one-man show where a single actor (played by the film's director) not only plays three different human characters but also Godzilla, Ghidrah, Giant Mafin, Ultraman and Ito Ogura (of SHOGUN ASSASSIN fame). This doesn't even take into account the fact that he also portrays a human trellis destroyed by Gojira's radioactive breath!

By using some pieces of cardboard to recreate some of the characters' features and miming their usual gestures, he battles his own replicas (skitful editing helps pull it off) in this 12 minute film short. There are even songs that use the classical themes by regular GODZILLA composer Akira Ifukube. GOJIRA VS MITOKOHMON participated at this year's Japan Yubari Fantasy Film Festival but failed to win an award which was a shame as it deserved something for its fresh and genius-like approach.

That about covers the more obscure appearances by the Big Green Guy. If anyone knows of more amateur short films that feature appearances by Godzilla not mentioned here, please contact me through the pages of ATC.

ATC LASER DISC GUIDE

by Forrest Batson

The following column will be a regular ATC feature as Forrest keeps readers informed about Hong Kong laser releases. These won't be film reviews, but rather, a consumer guide to the advantages of disc over the videotape version (if any). A star rating is used to determine the disc quality:

- * bad pressing, poor sound and/or quality.
- ** below average, could have been better.
- *** good disc but still has flaws.
- **** excellent quality sound and/or picture.
- ***** demonstration quality.

ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA (1991)

Disc Quality: *****

This disc, released in May of 1992, was pressed by Wilson/Ster Laserdisc Co. It is distributed by Laser Wave in Los Angeles. The running time is 2 hours and 13 minutes and is contained on two discs. Each disc has different artwork showcasing lots of stills from the film. At the beginning of side one is a surround sound check. The disc is in stereo and has dual audio tracks containing either the Mandarin or Cantonese soundtracks. The print quality is far above average and is also letterboxed at a 1.9:1 aspect ratio, retaining most of the original image. Another great bonus of this release is restored footage not found in the original theatrical release! Several scenes cut due to time constraints are included here such as a vital setup for the end sequence. Overall a must own for kung-fu fans and laser collectors alike. The 2 disc set has a list price of \$190 NOTE-this print has no English subtitles, but a few characters speak it that helps guide you through it. The tape version contains English subtitles.

THE KILLER (1989)

Disc Quality: **

This disc, originally released in September of 1990 and now out of print, has several problems. First the basics. It was pressed by Citymax Video Productions and distributed by Laser Wave in Los Angeles. Running time is approximately 112 minutes (a videotape version runs over 140 minutes) and it is letterboxed with an aspect ratio that changes from 1.75 to 1.9:1 throughout. The dual audio tracks are Mandarin

and Cantonese. The first of the disc's flaws is a dark, grainy picture quality that is so bad it whites out some scenes. There are many scratches and breaks which lead to spoiled music cues and many other distractions! The aspect ratio falls far short of the film's original Panavision (2.35:1) framing and a large portion of the picture is missing from most scenes. The English subtitles are clear and readable and the sound is Mono. The front cover features a shot of Chow Yun Fat and Danny Lee in the church while the back cover has a promo still of Fat and Sally Yeh in bed together. The single platter disc retails for \$110. There is a Japanese disc with a cleaner, brighter picture, but no English subtitles or a letterbox matte. It retails for around \$75.

A CHINESE GHOST STORY III (1991)

Disc Quality: ***

Production date for this Golden Cinema City disc is March 1992. It has digital Mono sound and is letterboxed with a 1.9:1 ratio. Running time is 111 minutes and once again, the dual audio channels are in Mandarin and Cantonese. The picture is clear and English subtitles are legible. The only faults I found were some splices and the poorly chosen side one break which interrupts an action scene. Price is \$110.

LEGEND OF THE BROTHERS (1991)

Disc Quality: *

This is a perfect example of how not to make a disc! The listed production date is January 1992 but the two-disc set only became

available this past July. The logic of two discs is lost since the film's running time is just under 2 hours. The opening and end credits are letterboxed, but the rest of the film is cropped. The subtitles appear high, low and sometimes even off the screen.

The picture is dark and faded and flickers even during daytime scenes. On sides 2 and 3 there were glitches in the picture causing it to warp and roll (I viewed two different copies and both had the same problems). A drawing and photos of the two leads are featured on the jacket. List price for the 2-disc set is \$190. The title on the cover is **LEGEND OF CHUUCHOW BROTHERS** but I used the title that appears on the print itself.

BULLET FOR HIRE (1991)

Disc Quality: **

The production date on this disc is September 1991 and it is distributed in the U.S. by World Video and Supply and by Eternity Video and Film in Canada. It is letterboxed in a 1.75:1 aspect ratio and has readable subtitles. Unfortunately the print used in the transfer is poor. The soundtrack has the usual dual Mandarin and Cantonese audio and is CX

encoded Mono. There are several breaks in the soundtrack and the print is dark, faded and flickers during the night scenes. It is a mystery why better care can't be taken with a lot of Chinese laser transfers. It certainly has nothing to do with the age of the print! The timing of the side break is excellent as it puts you right back into the action. There are two types of Jackets, one is for the U.S. release and has a photo spread, the other for the Hong Kong market will have an artist's drawing as in this case, a string of guns across the cover. List price is \$110.

DANCES WITH THE DRAGON (1991)

Disc Quality:***

There is not a list date for this disc but it appeared at a local store on 8-17-92. It is distributed by World Video and Supply here in the U.S. The disc is CX encoded with Cantonese on the digital tracks and Mandarin on the analog tracks. The image is letterboxed at 1.75:1 and, except for a few faded or grainy scenes, is a good transfer. The cover art features some nice stills including one of Andy Lau that's not in the film. Although Chu Kong has a cameo, he is not on the cover. List price is \$110.

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SUKEBAN DEKA

(Delinquent Girl Detectives)

by Alex Simmons

All right, that does it. Turn on the lights and roll up the shades. Those unstable Japanese filmmakers have abused my sensibilities for the last time. I should have seen it coming, considering Japan's reputation for abnormal entertainment. Everyone knows what I'm talking about: what other country would dare to make a movie concerning the angst of a jet-propelled flying turtle? Not to mention those comedies about umbrella-twirling Geisha girls who are attacked by fuzzy tumbleweeds whenever they remove their kimonos to show us some pubic hair. Well those Far Eastern crackpots have sinned again, and I'm so damned furious that I'm calling for an immediate boycott of all Yoko Ono CD's. My example for today has an appropriately refreshing title, SUKEBAN DEKKA. Although I hardly feel that a translation is necessary (*Delinquent Girl Detective*), a better title would be, perhaps, "Dawn of the Spark Sailing Defenders" or, even more suitable, "Watch Out! Speeding Yo Yo's!"

The premise behind this Oriental outrage (or outrages, considering that this art exhibit has actually spawned a sequel), suggests that nubile teenage girls would gladly wear confining body skirts, garments that fall so close to the ground that they would probably make a nun stumble. Before I attempt a more detailed

synopsis, I'm obliged to note that these films are in Japanese language only. I would like to share a few words about the potential for English dubbing. Just forget about it! This movie is painful enough without intensifying the torture by having characters who sound like a cross between Casper the Ghost and that Shan Lewis Lamb Chop thing.

SUKEBAN DEKKA tells the tale of a tyrannical vice-lord, intent on destroying the intellect of virtuous Japanese teenagers. Only without the interference of youth, will he attain his goal of global domination. So, he implements a campaign of guerrilla warfare training (mandatory for both guys and gals), as well as a discipline program which involves various applications of electro-shock bondage. Despite his dictatorial aspirations, it's apparent that our villain primarily delights in watching adolescents suffer. His military camps employ a team of merciless drill instructors, and he possesses a wide range of cattle prods and voltage-charged handcuffs. When it comes to electro-shock bondage, this madcap libertine really knows his stuff.

Our story begins on a warm, summer day when a lovesick schoolgirl buys a yo-yo from a leering street vendor. Caressing her new plaything lovingly, she's suddenly knocked

down by a crazed young man who's dashing wildly through the streets. Our heroine, although somewhat dazed, notices that the distracted young man dropped his notebook on the sidewalk. Valiantly, she retrieves the folder and runs after him.

She finally catches up to him as he's trying to hide in an idling City Transit bus, and, after boarding the vehicle herself, she breathlessly begins to chastise his careless behavior. Watch out! The exhausted young man had two greasy bed guys chasing him, and they leap onto the bus, hastily trying to snatch the notebook away from the considerate schoolgirl. She knows their kind, however, and pretends like everything's been a crazy joke and that the notebook was hers all along. Unfortunately, these slimy villains also know her kind, and the chubbier of the two pulls out an automatic rifle and aims it at the head of the bewildered bus driver.

The other criminal, who left his gun at home, quickly grabs the collar of the weary young man and starts to pound on the lad's skull with his fist. Chaos erupts as the Public Transportation vehicle launches recklessly down the highway. Our heroine, appalled at this sudden rudeness, clutches her yo-yo and flips her wrist back in a defiant pose. With amazing force, she catapults the spinning disc out of her hand and scores a direct hit by smashing the rifle out of the high-jacking sleazeball's hands. She turns rapidly and blasts the yo-yo into the face of the other goon, who yelps in pain and drops her newfound boyfriend to the floor. Mr. High-jacker, now furious with this female powderkeg, holds his aching trigger finger and lunges for her slim, young waist. At the same moment, his boyfriend-beating sidekick attacks her from behind. Whatever will she do now?

Well, she spins like a dervish and kung-fu kicks the heavyweight in the crotch, then twirls around and slaps his accomplice flat on the mouth. Curling her finely toned body into a ball, she somersaults down the bus aisle to the back, where she righteously grabs the fire extinguisher from above the emergency exit. Holding the plastic hose like a Samurai sword, she discharges the blinding white foam all over her two assailants, both of whom begin weeping like infants as the suffocating mist scorches their eyes. Unfortunately, she also coats the bus driver with the venomous splash, and the already upset motorist releases the wheel to creak his burning face. Our two teenaged defenders then hit the deck as the monstrous

shovel of a construction crane shatters through the front of the bus, crushing the three other occupants in a shrieking eruption of hissing steam and perversely growling metal.

Surprisingly, this fairly predictable beginning ushers in scenes of indisputably corrupt behavior. The distressed maiden awakens in the wreckage of the gutted bus, only to find herself surrounded by a veritable army of sneering scumbags, all dressed in identical gray business suits. She's escorted to a damp basement where her punishment awaits: sensory deprivation mingled with extended sessions of electro-shock bondage. Her face is then contorted in an agonized grimace, heavy ropes snaking across her squirming torso and fixing her firmly to a stainless steel chair.

We then meet the zany fascist responsible for all this commotion, and our man maniac boasts both an egocentric demeanor and an extremely annoying giggle. He fiendishly holds two buzzing electropoles to various regions of our heroine's body, barking questions as spittle leaks from his chin. I ask you, would English really give us any better idea of what was going on?

All respectability then gets dismembered as our long suffering female protagonist manages to escape from this impromptu prison by setting off the sprinkler system with her shoe. With graceful ease, she pulls her unconscious boyfriend through the door along side her. Guess what? Our pristine schoolgirl wasn't such an innocent victim after all. She knows a girl who is involved in this entire filthy business. So, our cute couple from the bumpy bus ride decide to enlist the other female friend in their battle against this recent outbreak of inexcusable behavior. (I think the bus riding female's name is Sake, don't ask me why.) Soon, Sake and her new boyfriend arrive at a combination toy factory and coffee shop. A rather aloof girl, identical in age and costume to Sake, sits behind the lunch counter preparing tea and stitching hair on a puppet's head.

I had meant to say at this point that things start getting extremely weird, but luckily I caught myself. Actually, I had better just say that things continue to be mundane and altogether unremarkable. Sake and the temperamental toymaker embrace and demonstrate their affection for one another by going into the garden and facing off like prizefighters. The two then proceed to throw marbles at one another, which they catch between their fingers while

laughing heartily. Watch out! This carefree fun conceals a vindictive undercurrent, and, as the film enters the second half, these three festive teenagers mutate into cold-hearted avengers, brazenly distributing their own refined brand of candyland vengeance.

My heart is convulsed in spasms of grief. I've deliberately avoided describing the rest of this exasperating film, an effort which could permanently immobilize my emotional stability. Suffice it to say, that, more disobedient teenagers are introduced, including a girl with red leather gloves who's apparently the patron saint of yo-yo warfare. She ultimately leads Sake and three other female hellions on a nighttime siege of the central teenage military training camp. (Yes, we do learn what the boyfriend and the other female friend have to do with all this. And, yes, we do find out more about what all this means.)

Sake, of course, triumphantly steals the show in the explosive finale, when she faces off one-on-one with the enraged voltage freaks. The frustrated dictator wasn't expecting Sake's formidable firepower (by this time she's loading her yo-yo with bullets), but the battle is far from over. You see, our megalomaniac has a big surprise in store for Sake, as he finally reveals to her why he gets such a big charge out of electricity.

I'll be wrapping this up shortly, as I feel the need to go lie down for a while. Did I mention that this motion picture actually has a sequel? It's called **SUKEBAN DEKKA ZA-ZOOM**. (Keep it to yourself.) That film blasts off from an unexpected sphere of lunacy, as we enter a society where yo-yo law enforcement has replaced conventional police procedure. Of

course, all the yo-yo officers are teenagers, and we soon learn that there's tension in their ranks. A controversy has regurgitated over this new form of crime control, because of, now get this, yo-yo brutality. That's all I can say right now, but be advised that the special effects here are not only excessive, they're absolutely surreal. In one scene, the corrupt yo-yo sheriffs become impatient with the goody-goody heroine's conviction to use no other weapon save for her yo-yo. The insurgent yo-yo protectors demonstrate their disrespect by arriving at the scene of a chaotic riot perched atop gigantic armored military tanks. They gleefully twirl their yo-yos above their heads while crushing the unfortunate pedestrians in the path of their vehicles.

Yeah, yeah, watch out. I would be remiss if I didn't mention that these two films proved so popular that a television series hit the Japanese airways shortly after the release of **ZA-ZOOM**. There, I've mentioned it. I just can't help but think, in spite of all my friends' approval for this nonsense (they call it "psychodrama"), that Western Civilization will undoubtedly suffer from this cinematic indiscretion. There's something subversive about this glorified affection for yo-yos during puberty, and I believe that the entire series is nothing more than a subliminal commercial for mandatory sterilization and zero population growth. But then again, I did say I had better go rest for awhile. Still, I now understand the recent popularity of yo-yos with our country's lucrative youth market. Our Nation's teenagers can add yo-yos to their list of everyday household utensils capable of bludgeoning the extremities of their elders. Speeding fly guards, indeed!

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Eight Questions For The Black Cat **JADE LEUNG**

BY RAINER CZECH & HELMUT G. DAWIN

TRANSLATED BY MARKUS NICK & PETER BLUMENSTOCK

ATC: *BLACK CAT* was your first movie. How did you manage to get the role?

JL: Let's just say I was very lucky. D & B Films was looking for an unknown face, a new face—so all the established actresses were not even considered. D & B Films published an advertisement that said they were searching for an unknown actress to play the lead in the film. I answered the ad and they auditioned me. After some rehearsing, I got the job. I know it sounds easy. But it really was.

ATC: *In the movie there are quite a few scenes that required great physical strength, did you do all the stunts yourself?*

JL: Oh yes. I never received any martial arts training, however my private activities, such as swimming, aerobics and jogging helped me to manage those scenes. It wasn't very easy and the stunts were as difficult as they looked.

ATC: *Have you always wanted to be in the movies?*



Simon Yam and Jade Leung from Black Cat

JL: Not at all. I could just as well earn my living working in an office. Having said that, I don't think there's anyone here in Hong Kong that hasn't considered entering the movie business at one time or another. Had I given it serious thought, I guess I would have attended acting classes.

ATC: Tell us something about your life. Were you born here in Hong Kong?

JL: Yes, I was born here on November 23, 1969. As you may have guessed, Jade Leung is my stage name. My real name is Leung Yuk Yin. Except for a short stay in Switzerland, at age 16, I have lived in Hong Kong my entire life.

ATC: Do you have an idol in the movie business?

JL: Here in Hong Kong I think Jackie Chan is one of the greatest. He proved that you can reach any goal you want, as long as you believe in yourself. At the same time, he has remained as friendly as the guy next door. He is a big star but never lost his head in the process. That is something I admire the most.

ATC: Any actresses?

JL: I liked Julia Roberts in *PRETTY WOMAN*.

ATC: What about your future?

JL: First we'll see how the audience likes *BLACK CAT*. The film has an open ending to make a second part possible and in fact, there are plans for a *BLACK CAT II* (*BLACK CAT II* is in production and is set in Russia-Rainer.). My contract with D & B Films is to star in another 16 films over the next 5 years.

ATC: Do you think that after *BLACK CAT*, you'll be typecast as a "tough" woman or would you prefer to head in a different direction like light comedy?

JL: Action movies are alright, as long as the audience wants to see me in those types of films, I'll continue to make them. However I don't want to remain fixed in those kinds of roles exclusively. I would love to play in a love story as long as it has a happy ending!



A Hard Look At HARD-BOILED

directed by John Woo

reviewed by Erik Sulev

After only a few viewings, it's safe to say that John Woo's latest film, **HARDBOILED**, is the best HK action/gunplay film ever. In fact, **HARDBOILED** is so good, that it's easily one of the best action films made by any director in the entire world.

Don't think for an instant that these statements are misguided hyperbole, and that **HARDBOILED** is just another jumbled arrangement of rapid shootouts and explosions which tries to pass itself off as a fast and furious action flick - a trend which unfortunately many of Woo's imitators in the HK film industry are doing these days. Instead, **HARDBOILED** is a beautifully crafted feature which is sometimes tragic, sometimes comedic, and always exhilarating.

It seems that with each new project, Woo tries something new, while at the same time he refines the styles and themes he has used before, and presents them in an 'improved', or fresher fashion.

In other words, each of Woo's productions easily stands on its own, and while we can always expect to see the "Woo-esque" themes and approaches he takes with each film, the movies are always progressively different. Just by looking at Woo's most recent features, **A BETTER TOMORROW 1 & 2**, **THE KILLER**, **BULLET IN THE HEAD**, **ONCE A THIEF** and now **HARDBOILED**, we can see how different each of these films is, and why it can be unfair to paint them all as identical action films.

First, **THE KILLER** revolutionized the HK action film by expertly molding the rapid and vicious gunplay and melodramatic themes first used in the **A BETTER TOMORROW** series into a far more even combination, which despite the (enjoyable) extremes, doesn't veer as jaggedly between them.

As well, the combination of brutal violence and soap opera-ish melodrama would have been reduced to a laughable mess by a less competent director, but Woo managed to make audiences accept the unbelievable. In

HARDBOILED, the melodrama is kept to a minimum, but Woo still makes its existence known, and because of our appreciation for his previous work, we are thankful for it.

Both **BULLET IN THE HEAD** and **ONCE A THIEF** were radical departures for Woo, that were not always openly received by audiences and critics. **BULLET IN THE HEAD** was found to be much too tragic and bleak by HK audiences' standards which resulted in poor box office for the film. **ONCE A THIEF** on the other hand, was a box office smash, yet critics were stupefied by the lighter nature, and the fact that Woo and his cast made fun not only of themselves, but of what was expected of the action genre as well. Although I admired **BULLET IN THE HEAD** much more, **ONCE A THIEF** is a favorite because of its uniqueness. Perhaps some prefer sequels and imitations over innovation, but **THIEF** stands out because of Woo's decision to deliver the goods in an unexpected fashion. He has taken some of the tragic themes from **BULLET**, along with a few instances of broader comedy themes as found in **THIEF**, combining them with the straight forward action zest found in **THE KILLER** and **BETTER TOMORROW** films, resulting in **HARDBOILED**.

What could have ended up as yet another cliché "buddy-buddy" cop film supersedes all expectations, because of John Woo's unique flair and ability in presenting a wide range of material, within a plotline which could have been severely limiting. If **HARDBOILED** is indeed Woo's swan song within the HK film community, then he couldn't have exited with a finer piece of art.

Although the Chinese translation of the title reportedly means God of Guns (I've also heard Sharpshooter as a translation), the English title of **HARDBOILED** is appropriate. HK superstar (and Woo favorite), Chow Yun Fat portrays "Tequila", a cop with the finest marksmanship of all the HK police, who possesses a strong sense of disregard for the rules when they get

in the way of getting the job done. Tequila is growing increasingly disturbed by the number of his comrades being slain in the line of duty, each death resulting in a mournful clarinet solo played by Tequila and his jazz combo. Tequila's skills (his shooting, not his soloing!) are amply displayed at the film's opening when he and his partner (who is also his drummer), are undercover in a Dim Sung restaurant hoping to get the jump on a ruthless gang of gun-runners.

Naturally, the result is a blazing gun-battle which can only be described as jaw-dropping. Brilliantly choreographed, photographed and edited, the battle is one that will be imitated for years to come. Included among the carnage are several innocent bystanders who happen to be in the way of the escaping gang, an example of violence rarely seen in American action pictures.

We quickly learn that Tequila is on the trail of a ruthless gun-runner (Philip Chan), who despite his dapper exterior, is as vicious as they come. Unable to get the goods on his enemy, Tequila instead prefers to provoke him with taunts and threats. During one of those provocations, Tequila gets sucker-punched by Hit-man Tony (Tony Leung, "Ben" from *BULLET IN THE HEAD*), who then prevents the unconscious

Tequila from being shot by the enraged criminal. As it turns out, Tony Leung has the pivotal role of the film. What exactly are the secrets that his character is obviously hiding deep inside himself?

As the film progresses, we learn that the source of Tony's torment is the truth about his real identity. In truth, Tony is a cop who has gone undercover so deeply that he is about to crack. Six years earlier, his commander (who co-incidentally is also Tequila's), sent Tony undercover to pose as a hit-man for the Triads with instructions to do whatever necessary to maintain his cover.

Tony's only way of communicating with the department is by sending white roses with a romantic musical poem, which when decoded by breaking the message down into its musical notes, informs the commander of what exactly is going on. Unfortunately, the strain of playing his role is starting to be far too much for Tony as he slowly becomes overwhelmed by guilt over several murders he has had to commit. Forced to play his role to the hilt, Tony eliminates more than a few enemies for his bosses, and in one charged scene, he proves his new loyalty to the gun-runner by cutting down his former boss and his gang with a hail



John Woo (L) and Chow Yun Fat on the set of *Hard-Boiled*

of automatic machine gun fire, even after they have surrendered and laid down their weapons. To atone for his sins, Tony makes origami birds for each of his victims, reminding him of what he has done, and not surprisingly, this boat where he lives is filled with them.

Understandably, Tony wants out and he knows that Tequila is the only man good enough to help him get out and finish off the gang, but the problem lies in exactly how to inform Tequila of what he really is without the Triad catching on to his true intentions, and more importantly, how to prevent the trigger-happy Tequila from putting a bullet in his head, as he singlehandedly wipes out those responsible for the death of his partner. At one point, Tequila aims his silver-plated handgun point blank at Tony's head, only to have it misfire when he pulls the trigger! Before he gets to try a second time, Tequila discovers the truth from his commanding officer, and he and Tony prepare to take down the gang.

Working against them however, is that they don't know where the secret hideout is, and secondly, the gun-runner's right-hand man (expertly played by Shaw Brothers kung-fu stalwart Cheung Jue Lun), is suspicious of Tony's background (shitflies when he discovers the truth).

Cheung's role is meaty, and he often over shadows Chan's portrayal of the boss. His martial arts skills are viciously honed and his brutal strength leaves no opponents standing. To piss Cheung off even further, he lost an eye during a previous skirmish with Tequila during the cop's one man attack on the criminal's warehouse, and he's now looking to even the score.

At one point, while grappling with both Tony and Tequila (and winning at that), he tells them that the two things he hates the most are cops and those who kill their own bosses (as Tony has done), an act he considers the ultimate example of betrayal and shame. In other words, Tequila and Tony have serious problems!

If you've not drained 90 minutes into the film, then wait until the final 30 hits you square between the eyes! Discovering that Chan's hideout is hidden inside a hospital that he owns, Tequila and Tony make their way in through a secret passage in the morgue and encounter more than a few tricks, booby-traps, and armed enemies, while members of the police-force have infiltrated the medical center posing as doctors and orderlies. Sensing that his freedom

in HK is coming to an end, the gun-runner orders the hospital sealed off, and a hostage situations ensues as he and his men start eliminating patients, until their safety can be guaranteed.

Perhaps one of the most exciting instances occurs when Tequila, and his one-time girlfriend, now a superior officer (Teresa Mo, in a secondary, yet important role), along with the HK SWAT team try to save a number of babies from the infant ward of the hospital by lowering them out of a fourth story window while the gang takes pot-shots at them! To lighten up the mood, Woo has Chew and Mo stuff cotton into the babies ears so the gunshots won't scare them, and in one unbelievable instant, a baby pisses on a fire on Tequila's leg thus putting it out and saving the day! As always, Woo knows when to be serious, and when to have fun in the right places.

The final climatic confrontation can only be described as nerve-shattering, and I'm not going to reveal who lives and who dies - that you will have to see for yourself.

Frantically paced, **HARDBOILED** rockets through its two hour-plus running time. Rumor has it that Woo's personal director's cut has nearly another half hour of footage trimmed from the theatrical release. At the time of this writing (mid-August), I have not seen the "complete" version, but will have a chance to do so when Woo personally presents his cut in Toronto during the annual Festival of Festivals in September.

What's missing? Judging from the trailer (which also sets a new record for excitement in a short period of time), there are a few dramatic scenes that did not make it into the theatrical print. It is not known whether any action scenes were deleted. Apparently, **HARDBOILED** did run into trouble with the HK film classification group and was nearly given the harsh, Category III rating for the extreme levels of violence. It's hard to tell however, if anything was snipped in terms of violence, since the action scenes remain fluid in their presentation and remain far more extreme than any US R-rated film would ever be.

What else can be said, but to see **HARDBOILED** at any cost (I'm deadly serious, do whatever it takes), and let's hope that Woo's American film release, **HARD TARGETS**, will revitalize this country's action film genre, which has become stuck in a rut of wisecracking Arnie wannabees.



Over-the-Top with **RICKY O**

By Travis Crawford

Although the resurgent Stateside interest in Hong Kong cinema is certainly rooted in an abundance of factors (dissatisfaction with Western genre product, curiosity in respect to another culture, et al.), there is one obvious element among many of the films which would seem to be a major point of interest: excess. Whether it be John Woo's ballistics-hidden displays of hyperactive pyrotechnics, or Tui Hark's colorful nationalistic fantasy and adventure segues, Hong Kong films have transcended their culturally specific origins to appeal to American audiences by sheer force. And if Hong Kong cinema is truly worthy of the world prize for being the "cinema of spectacle," then I'd be hard pressed to think of a more indicative example than the staggering prison actioner, **RICKY O**.

As much as I perversely enjoy overanalyzing films for the sake of scholarly pretension, **RICKY O** simply defies such a treatment—the only valid reaction one can have to the movie is jaw-dropping amazement. **RICKY O** more than transcends its somewhat banal plot by assailing the viewer with some of the most over-the-top, heavily stylized, staggeringly grisly violence and action sequences I've ever seen in a film; in fact, given that pleasures of the film lie so far outside of the text, a brief summary of the, uh, "story" is in order:

The year 2001: prisons, like all government institutions, have been "privatized" and sold as franchises (!). Into this environment of corruption arrives new inmate Ricky O, a superhuman-strength flute student jailed for killing a Triad leader in retaliation for the death of his girlfriend at the hands of the gang. Ricky quickly learns of the greed and tyranny that control the prison: the other inmates cower in fear of the glass-eyed, hook-handed assistant warden, and his "Gang of 4," a group of bullying stooges who slaughter any poor sap who happens to stand in the way of the prison's primary goal: Reforming the inmates into socially productive model citizens, you ask? No! —growing poppy leaves for opium manufacturing in the West Cell, of course! Ricky takes none too kindly to this oppression of the masses for criminal means—or to frequent attempts on his life—and utilizes his otherworldly kung-fu skills (he was taught by his kindly old uncle, who utilized that age-old method of throwing massive granite tombstones through the air for Ricky to shatter in mid-flight...don't ask) to defeat several opponents and threats, and ultimately to burn down the poppy field.

This humanitarian use of arson sits none too well, however, with the just returning head warden, a lanky bespectacled tyrant whose ideas of prisoner care might not exactly be in

line with Amnesty International standards--the bumps in the red carpet laid out for his return inspire him to penetrate the offending prisoner's eyeball with a steel-tipped umbrella, and--upon hearing another inmate grumble about the scarcity of edible food served to the prisoners--the kindly warden grinds the complaining man's arm into a meat slicer and offers the wounded individual his own limb for nourishment. Needless to say, the ever-righteous Ricky browns on such displays, and the personalities of Mr. O and the warden, uh, clash. The warden's attempt to dispose of Ricky by burying him alive fails, and Ricky also defeats the members of the Gang of 4, led by the strapping Huang Chuan (KUNG FU WONDER CHILD and ANGEL star Yukari Oshima pulls a Linda Hunt, and plays Huang, a man...again, don't ask). The ensuing social upheaval results in a full-scale revolt among the inmates, the removal of the assistant warden from his appointed post, a "conflict" between our young hero and the warden, a creature-transformation sequence which made me wonder if I was beginning to hallucinate yet again, and numerous torn limbs, retina removals, crushed craniums, flying viscera, dismembering, decapitations and disembowelments.

Could the frequently repeated image of violated tools at sight be the filmmaker's homage to Eisenstein's POTEMKIN? Are the filmmakers utilizing a stylized futuristic setting to comment in a metaphorical sphere, on the current oppression of the masses, placing the film within the same genre of socio-political commentary as Peter Greenaway's THE COOK, THE THIEF, HIS WIFE AND HER LOVER? Are you Fucking crazy? Do you think this movie has a thought in its head? Like Woo's HARDBOILED, the film has stripped itself down of even the slightest pretensions to narrative and/or subtext focus, simply in order to leave the widest possible forum for its whole reason for existence: violence, as ludicrously overwrought, gory, and hyper-energetically depicted as the medium will allow. Indeed, like several other Hong Kong efforts (MEN BEHIND THE SUN leaps nauseatingly to mind), any more detailed synopsis of the "plot" would read much like an never-ending catalog of atrocities.

The various would-be assassins sent to dispatch Ricky meet their fate in a variety of stomach churning ways: Wild Cat and the 400 pound elephant are disembowelled by a single punch each from Ricky (but not before Wild

Cat's hand is crushed into non-existence); despite having ground glass hurled into his eyes and his "sinews slashed" by his opponent, Ricky defeats his prison courtyard assailant by hitting the burly attacker in the head so hard his eye explodes out (this same individual then slits his own stomach open, pulls his intestinal tract out, and attempts to strangle Ricky with it). Gang of 4 member Taizen is defeated by having his arm shattered, his lower jaw torn off, his hand pulverized into a mass of crimson ooze, before finally being crushed by a massive steel block slowly lowered onto his body; other Gang of 4 cronies must be content to suffer less prolonged--although no less spectacularly grisly--demises. Huang/Oshima has his/her leg hurled into a tank of boiling water before it is just hecked off altogether, while his/her weasel playmate simply explodes, the result of a nasty encounter with a gas stove and a hollow-tipped bullet.

The assistant warden's method of transporting inmates--burrowing his hook into their faces and dragging them across the floor--ultimately sits none too well with the oppressed. They reward his disciplinary tactics by knocking one of his eyes--the good one, incidentally--out of his skull (does one sense a motif yet?), slashing his throat with broken glass, chopping off one of his arms (dismemberment would seem to be running in a dead heat race with eyeball dislocation as the filmmaker's choice method of body mutilation), and then dragging him to the warden. He reprimands his underling for a lack of disciplinary action by inflating the man until he explodes. Inmate Sha--already lacking a tongue, as a result of the Gang of 4's utilization of creative dental surgery--has the skin of his face flayed off for informing Ricky of the poppy field.

Last one think that our intrepid eponymous protagonist seems exempt from all this ensuing mayhem throughout the course of the film, Ricky is--among other agonies--hurled into brick walls, electrocuted, frequently penetrated by the Gang of 4's weapons of choice--knifing needle-type instruments affixed to elastic cables, beaten with a wrench, end--my personal favorite--force-fed a handful of razor blades by Huang, who then tapes his lips shut. Other individuals are simply stabbed, crucified, beaten, drowned in wet cement, decapitated (with a single slap to the head) and machine-gunned (how mundane). One should also be aware that the climax--without revealing too

much—involves the most creative usage of an industrial meat grinder I've seen in quite some time.

No doubt, the more plasma-thirsty readers scanning this have already seen fit to drop this article and desperately attempt to obtain a copy of **RICKY O** (aka **THE STORY OF RICKY**) at this very moment, simply based on the inventory of grotesqueries listed above. But for the more critically astute/cilist (That leaves me out-Craig.) of us, the question remains as to the actual quality of **RICKY O** as a piece of filmmaking, e.g. is it a good movie?



As much as the film would seem to desire to subvert any critical analysis of it (not making my job any easier) by displaying all of its favorable attributes/charms on a superficial, "immediate gratification" level (and a rather basic one at that), the fact of the matter is that **RICKY O** is actually a great film, in that it creates a mind-blowing, delicious, laughably unrealistic overall framework for all its sub-Lucio Fulci gore affects and hyper-real Grand Guignol freak-show shock tactics. As repugnant as the specifics of the film seems, within the break-necked pecced, larger-than-life, comic book approach to the material, they certainly add to the, um, entertainment. And despite the flaws of the film—non-existent script and characterization, compounded by what occasionally seems like an overly slim budget (the interior of the prison isn't exactly **ISLAND OF FIRE** material—a stairwell thrown into an otherwise blank set is more accurate)—**RICKY O** succeeds overwhelmingly because of its maniacally energetic (borderline ridiculous) style, which defies you to not be somehow perversely entertained—or at least amazed—not to mention take it seriously. Indeed, this is no **ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA** or **BULLET IN**

THE HEAD; the giddy, goofy grue of **ROBOTRIX** is more like it.

This is not to suggest, however, that the film works purely accidentally—in fact, there are numerous stylistic touches which indicate the director had a very firm, assured grasp on the film's excessive style—the rapid-fire editing stands out notably, as does an oddly memorable moment when the film shock-cuts to a split-second colorful x-ray of a prisoner's skull shattering upon impact with a fetal blow, suggesting a uniquely fashioned, self-aware (as well as non-diegetic) approach to somewhat familiar material. **RICKY O** also livers up its proceedings with several bizarre moments of vaguely campy black humor, e.g. the assistant warden's glass eye also doubles as a "mint dispenser" (don't look at me, I'm still trying to figure out what the deal was with Oshima's badly dubbed male voice).

Yet another praiseworthy factor contributing to the film's success is its astounding ability to not only maintain such a fevered pitch of high-octane delirium throughout its running time, but also to surpass its previous psychotic indulgences for its truly otherworldly climax. Whereas most films structured completely around wild seepces frequently tend to suffer from inevitably flat, anti-climatic endings as a result, **RICKY O** actually manages to top itself (no mean feat) within the final 15 minutes, wherein the narrative collapses (or elevates, depending on your point of view) into sheer insanity, evolving into a synapse-frying "body-in-pieces" fantasy of unending violence, the extremes of which, I can hardly ever recall viewing before. And if one should doubt the grandiose, mythical approach to the material, no further proof than the physics-defying final scene should be required.

In short, the amazing **RICKY O** is perhaps the only HK effort I've seen recently that succeeds in making **SEEDING OF A GHOST** look positively restrained by comparison, and is also one of the best "candy bar" movies I've seen in ages (i.e. you might not feel too nourished afterwards, but you'll be enjoying yourself too much at the time to care). Guilty pleasure of the year? Hell, maybe guilty pleasure of the decade! In any case, if you needed the hyperbole reiterated, I simply urge you to see this film immediately, at any cost, particularly if you—like I—need a film to prove to you that you're not nearly as cinematically jaded as you might think.



YAKUZA

Losers On Parade

by Chris D.

In one of my Japanese dictionaries, the word Yakuza is defined as: useless, good-for-nothing, scrubby, trashy, a bad egg, etc. No mention though of the words: gangster, crook, gambler. Why? I'm not sure but if I was to hazard a guess, I'd say it's the seemingly innate duality of feeling the Japanese have for and about the Yakuza. Euphemisms rule or rather, as in this case, abstractions.

A separate article alone could be written on what the Yakuza is today versus what they were, say twenty years ago; what they were immediately post-WW2 when they occasionally served as strong-arm men for the occupation forces in breaking up strikes and helping throw leftist forces into chaos; what they were at the turn of the century, etc. The Yakuza were originally made up primarily of bakuto -- gamblers -- and despite their somewhat shady reputation and sometimes violent temperament,

they were ruled by feudal codes of chivalry and giri -- obligation -- in oyabun/kobun -- master/apprentice or father/son relationships that were cemented with ties of fanatical loyalty.

That there's a vaguely discernible, yet still definite lineage traceable to the samurai class of yore is without question. Masterless samurai, or ronin, made unemployable by the gradual onslaught of peace and the slow-as-molasses dissolving of the feudal system took to the road as roving, independent spirits. Romanticized in story and song for at least a good two hundred years, it wasn't until the sixties that the demythologizing of the roaming, valiant samurai had impact, first in Kurosawa's pair of samurai-with-no-name pix *YOJIMBO* and *SANJURO*, then more prolifically in the films of directors like Hideo Gosha, Kihachi Okamoto, Kenji Misumi, Tokuzo Tanaka, Kimiyoshi Yasuda, Teruo Ishii, Kazuo Mori, etc. As early as the thirties,

Japanese films depicted existential/nihilist swordsmen, for example, Daisuke Ito's **MAN-SLASHING, HORSE-PIERCING SWORD**. Reasons why it wasn't until **YUJIMBO** etc, that this image had impact are partly self-evident. There's neither time or space to go into the more esoteric whys and where-fors, but just for superficial starters, try WW2 (about the only time in modern times the Japanese have been defeated), the Vietnam War and the worldwide student unrest of the sixties.

More often than not, ronin were reduced to starving, disenchanted and disillusioned swords-for-hire willing to do bodyguard work or if such wasn't available, anything from armed robbery to paid assassinations, to helping some wealthy "marchant" build up their own private army of brigands. Of course, good and bad ronin, both in the fantasy of films and literature and in real life, were given to gambling in their spare time.

That these gamblers would form into bands, either out of deep fraternal bonds of friendship or out of necessity to protect themselves and their financial interests was inevitable. Thus, the initial clans of Yakuza were born. Some of the gangs were noble, ex-samurai gamblers pledged to not prey on the weak or the common people and there were some who were looked up to as Robin Hood types (i.e. the character of Chuji in **THE GAMBLING SAMURAI**) while others were little better than shrewd cutthroat con-men, hungry for wealth, power and decadent pleasures and not particular how they achieved these goals.

The term Yakuza actually is made up of the numbers ya-6-ku-9-sa-3 which, when added together, forms the worst score in the popular game of hanafuda - flower cards: a 20 which equals zero. So, a loser. A self-conscious and supposedly gallant loser. Although after WW2 the Yakuza's continued association with ultra-rightist and ultra-nationalist groups helped to tar them with the brush of money grubbing, imperialist fascists with little regard for the individual or ideas different from their own.

There are three different types of Yakuza: bakuto-gamblers, tekiya-street peddlers and your normal garden-variety hoodlums.

Of course the Yakuza exists, as does the samurai, in a different and separate reality on film, TV and in literature in much the same way that the cowboy and gunfighter do in American culture. If you look for too many correlations in 'real life' in the Yakuza films, you'll come up short. You'll be doing the actors, directors and

Yakuza star Koji Tsuruta



writers as much a disservice as yourself. It's best to look at the pictures as you would the Spaghetti Westerns, violent -- sometimes ultra-violent -- tall tales with romantic and/or nihilistic protagonists caught up in the conflicts where very often the only way out is death.

Quite often, the lead character will be a quiet, strong man of principle -- these are usually played by Takakura Ken or Koji Tsuruta, or Yujiro Ishihara -- forced into untenable situations because of either loyalty to friends, obligation -- girl -- to the gang or something as nebulous as responsibility to themselves; just as often you'll find the lead characters amoral, barely-in-control homicidal maniacs -- usually played by the likes of Bunta Sugawara and Noboru Ando (an actual former Yakuza himself) -- who, nevertheless, end up being gutsy individualists. They are beautiful losers, courageously facing certain death by going up against the faceless corporate gangs that have branded them hotheaded outcasts. Wataru Tetsuya, Hiroki Matsukata and Jyo Shishido are three actors whose careers seem to be evenly divided between both types.

Another actor who appears in numerous Yakuza pix, though rarely in the lead, is someone fairly familiar to American audiences, Tetsuro Tamba. Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba although appearing in many Yakuza films since the mid-sixties, would have undoubtedly been one of the main contenders in the leading man

stakes, had his rise in popularity in the mid-seventies not seem to have coincided with the waning of the Yakuza genre. The late Tomisaburo Wakayama, pre-Baby Cart, also appears in character and secondary lead roles too numerous to count.

And last, but certainly not least, are DAIJI Films' Shintaro Katsu and the late Raizo Ichikawa. Both appeared in numerous Yakuza films even to the point of having their own series -- Katsu in two: the 16 picture **AKUMYO (BAD REPUTATION)** and the 9 picture **HEITAI YAKUZA (HOODLUM SOLDIER)** -- technically not really a Yakuza series, but immensely entertaining B&W war films -- I've included because of Katsu's character, a drafted, small-time Yakuza gambler who constantly rubs against the grain of the Japanese army's sadistic discipline; and Ichikawa in the **WAKAI OYABUN (YOUNG BOSS)** series. However both Katsu and Ichikawa are predominately known for their Samurai film output which outnumbers any Yakuza efforts 3-to-1 -- Katsu for his portrayal of the wandering blind swordsman/masseur, **ZATOICHI** in 26 films; Ichikawa for his roles as **KYOSHIRO NEMURI, SON OF THE BLACK MASS** in 12 films and various legendary Ninja in the 8 picture **SHINOBI NO MONO**.

In this initial article I'll be covering only Yakuza pix made during the heyday of the genre -- 1961 through 1975. Before you ask why such a limit, you should be made aware that TOEI Studios alone (the main producer of Yakuza films), made over 300 yakuza films in a ten year period. The Japanese film industry told Yakuza stories before the sixties (see Kurosawa's **STRAY DOG** and **DRUNKEN ANGEL** for just two such examples -- albeit atypical ones). And there are still Yakuza films being produced today, though in a fraction of the number.

Now that you have the basics, here's an alphabetical listing of Yakuza films. Those on tape, I found at four different Japanese Video stores -- Central Video, J-Wave and Tokyo Video Market -- in L.A.'s Little Tokyo and Video Japan in Gardens. These pix have NOT been dubbed NOR have they been subtitled in English -- except for a select few (that I'm aware of): **TATTOOED HITMAN (YAMAGUCHI GUMI GAIDEN)** -- **KYUSH SHINKO SAKUSEN**), dubbed and re-edited (to 3/4 its original length) by New Line Cinema and **GOLGO 13 - KOWLOON ASSIGNMENT** with Shinichi

"Sonny" Chiba. The excellent **SHUSSO IWAL** with Tetsuya Nakadai and directed by the late Hideo Goshe was just recently released uncut under the English-language title, **THE WOLVES**, by a company called World Artists. It is letterboxed with English sub-titles.

The video boxes are covered with lurid pop art composed of garish colors, stylized representations of Japanese characters (titles and credits) and photos from the movies. On initial exposure, the best description I can give of MY first impression is : **OVERWHELMING SENSORY OVERLOAD**. That's undoubtedly why I like these movies so much. They're very different in style AND content (though not the level of violence) from the Hong Kong martial arts/cop-action pix -- more mood, better developed characters, more introspective in tone. They're also among the most warped, nihilistic and sometimes romantic films I've ever seen. You've been warned.

Since virtually none of these films have been formally released in English-language speaking nations, the titles have been translated from the Japanese characters -- first in romanized form (in other words phonetically transposed from the Japanese to the roman alphabet), then into English. Some of the titles never got past the romanization stage. Sound confusing? Well, rest assured that I've run about 85% of these "romanizations" by folks who know Japanese, and they've either corrected them or OK'ed them. So if you go into a Japanese video store with the romanized title (that's post-Japanese alphabet and pre-English) you shouldn't have any problem making yourself understood.

To show my opinion (level of enjoyment) of the film rather than any kind of objective appraisal of quality, I've used a four star system : **** being the best, down to * being the worst. I would like to thank the librarians at the Japanese Cultural Center Library in Little Tokyo, Ryoji Shido, my first semester Japanese teacher-Yoko Mimori, and the guys at Central Video for their help in making some of these titles intelligible to Western eyes and ears.

YAKUZA FILMS

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI (ABASHIRI PRISON)
1965 B&W 92 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/Takakura Ken, Tetsuro Tamba -- First in probably the most well-known and successful Yakuza series in Japan. Ken plays his most common character, a lone wolf outcast/outlaw who moves easily through the underworld, but

because he's basically a decent and honorable fellow, he gets little peace. He's constantly running afoul of either badass bad guys or hypocritical cops. Or a rowdy and/or irresponsible friend leads him into trouble. This one begins with Ken entering prison. As usual, personal feuds erupt and before too long Ken's put into solitary. A sympathetic cop (Tambo) is favorably disposed towards Ken. But things are spoiled when Ken and a homicidal animal he's hand-cuffed to, make a break, jumping off the work detail transport into the snow. At least the last third of our tale is the conflict between the two guys and how Tambo eventually catches up with them. Also, for you folks into the auteur view of the celluloid universe, Ishii directed JOYS OF TORTURE, BLIND WOMAN'S CURSE, HELL'S TATTOOERS, etc..

*** VHS=Toei

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI, ZOKU (RETURN FROM ABASHIRI PRISON) 1965 87 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Takakura Ken -- Ken's out of prison and involved with a sockful of stolen diamonds, a drunk stripper, her baby and house-husband mate, a devoted girlfriend, a gang boss who ends up throwing Ken in one of those sauna boxes for info on the diamonds, a wise and elderly prison buddy and a fire festival #2 in the series

** 1/2 VHS=Toei

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - BOU KYO HEN (ABASHIRI PRISON - DESIRE FOR ONE'S NATIVE GROUND) 1965 88 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/Takakura Ken -- One of my faves in the series despite the first appearance of one of the sentimental contrivances that occasionally mar the saga -- a little kid -- even though the little tyke is a coal black Japanese boy (an American GI as a father?). Ken fights with both samurai sword AND knife in this one -- something he does a lot in other Yakuza films but not nearly enough in this one. #3 in the series

*** VHS=Toei

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - HOKKAÏ HEN (ABASHIRI PRISON - NORTHERN SEACOAST) 1966 90 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/Takakura Ken - Our hero ends up with the usual assortment of weirdos running goods in the snowy north in a decrepit truck. His idiot pal accidentally lets his foot off the brake when they're trying to ease the wheel out of a rut and one of the shadier characters has his chest crushed. The other

tough guy ends up brutalizing the cast-off till Ken gets the upper hand. Great scene when Ken stops off at a rural Yakuza clan's pad in route to avenge some past BS. After coercing the local boss to cut off his pinkie in apology, Ken feeds the amputated finger joint to the chickens! #4 in the series

*** VHS=Toei



ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - ARANO NO TAIKETSU (ABASHIRI PRISON - DUEL IN THE WILDERNESS) 1966 89 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/Takakura Ken - Strange episode with Ken, at one point, getting revenge on the guy who killed his sheldand pony! Has it's moments. #5 in the series

** VHS=Toei

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - NANKOKU NO TAIKETSU (ABASHIRI PRISON - DUEL IN THE SOUTH) 1966 88 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Takakura Ken - Ken gets a crewcut and heads down to the semi-tropical environs of the south coast! Entertaining when detailing the small-time smuggling/piracy plot. Annoying subplot with a kid whose mom's a white lipstickked whore brings this down half a notch. Cool sunset swordfight at close. #6 in the series.

** 1/2 VHS=Toei

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - DAISETSUGEN NO TAIKETSU (ABASHIRI PRISON - DUEL IN THE SNOW COUNTRY) 1966 90 min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Takakura Ken #7 in the series. VHS=Toei

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - KETSU TO JU SHITA 30 TEN (ABASHIRI PRISON - OPENING OF LOWER 30 BY DEMAND OF TEN'S DECISION) 1967 88 Min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Takakura Ken, Tetsuro Tamba - Ken, back in the snow, hanging out with miners and running about of creepy protection/extortion crew, victimizing miners and their families. Tamba runs a local saloon. #8 in the series

*** VHS=Toei

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - AKU ENO CHOSEN (ABASHIRI PRISON) 1967 90 Min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Takakura Ken #9 in the series. VHS=Toei

ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - KOTOFUKU NO TO ARASU (ABASHIRI PRISON - RAGE OVER THE BRAGGING SCOUNDREL) 1967 87 Min. Dir. Teruo Ishii w/ Takakura Ken, Noboru Ando, Tatsuo Umemiya - Bizarre and thoroughly enjoyable entry with Ken escaping solitary through a tunnel and then in a deceased prisoner's coffin. Noboru and Tatsuo are co-leaders of a brutal bandit quartet and end up helping Ken kidnap his ex-girlfriend. They torch her husband's ski lodge (he just happens to be the guy who lied about Ken many years before, setting up his best friend when they were in the army, causing the friend's death for which Ken was blamed). Plenty of bigger-than-life tall tale details and violent dynamics. #10 in the series

*** VHS=Toei

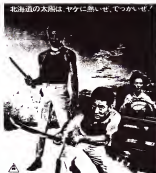
SHIN ABASHIRI BANGAICHI (ANOTHER ABASHIRI PRISON or A NEW ABASHIRI PRISON STORY) 1968 94 Min. Dir. Makino Masahiro w/Takakura Ken - A new character as well as a new story. Ken's just back from WW2 when he spots some U.S. GIs trying to rape a Japanese woman. He beats the b@sses out of 'em and gets hauled off to an integrated (US/Japanese) military prison up north in Hokkaido. About a third of the way through, he's once again a free man and befriends numerous folks earning a living as tekiya - street peddlers. Of course, there's a local gang of bad guys trying to monopolize the street trade. A pal who's also one of the most respected guys in the community, gets murdered in a drive-by shooting. Ken's other pal goes to avenge the death single-handedly and is ventilated, too. Which obviously necessitates Ken heading over to bad guy HQ for some mass slaughter. #11

*** VHS=Toei

SHIN ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - RUJINMISAKI NO KETTOH 1969 109 Min. Dir. Yasuo Kohata w/ Takakura Ken, Kaneko Iwazaki, Takashi Shimura - Ken and fellow inmates get transferred down to sunny environs on a low-security beach community. They live in prison dorms, work unloading on the docks and have more freedom than usual. Familiar Takashi Shimura (IKIRU, 7 SAMURAI, RASHOMON, etc.) plays the crusty but liberal warden whom engenders a great deal of loyalty and love from the prisoners. Too talky and occasionally too sentimental through three fourths of its running time. Until Ken has to perpetrate the usual radical surgical removal of evil Yakuza clan by massacre - this time at a bizarre op-art eyesore of a nightclub. #12 in the series

*** VHS=Toei

SHIN ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - SAI HATENO NAGARE MONO 1969 93 Min. Dir. Kyoshi Sasaki w/Takakura Ken, Yuriko Hoshi - #13 in the series VHS=Toei



新編 走番外地

SHIN ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - DAISHINRIN NO KETTOH 1970 105 Min. Dir. Yasuo Kohata w/Takakura Ken, Jyo Shishido. #14 in the series. VHS=Toei

SHIN ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - FUBUKINO NO HAGUR OOKAMI 1970 107 Min. Dir. Yasuo Kohata w/Takakura Ken, Tomisaburo Wakayama. #15 in the series. VHS=Toei

SHIN ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - ARASHI WO YOBU SHIRITOKO MISAKI 1971 105 Min. Dir. Yasuo Kohata w/Takakura Ken - As usual, Ken is just out of prison, and all he's got to dress in is a spectacularly ugly red sub-jacket, white pants and T-shirt with two-finger peace/US stars-n-stripes design. That the picture has its tongue-in-cheek is emphasized when Ken does his double-take upon spotting himself in a poster for Asahi Beer. He gets into a fight with some bosozoku bikers in a bar. The owners, appreciative of his help, haul his unconsolous form out to their horse-breeding ranch. It turns out they're all reformed Yakuza. Seems there's also a decidedly unreformed Yakuza clan headed up by a sadist in white flowing flilly shirt, leather vest, toreador hat and horsewhip. His lover, a barely in control psycho who looks like a Latino Gabe Kaplan (**WELCOME BACK KOTTER**), lends it over the bosozoku bikers, using them as muscle when he's outnumbered. Until halfway through, I thought this series entry was a decidedly poor specimen. Then suddenly, the feud between the good guys and the bad guys really erupts, and things get strange. #16 in the series.

*** VHS=Toei

SHIN ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - FUBUKI NO DAIDASSOH 1971 110 Min. Dir. Yasuo Kohata w/Takakura Ken. #17 in the series. VHS=Toei

SHIN ABASHIRI BANGAICHI - ARASHI YOBU DANPU JINGI 1972 108 Min. Dir. Yasuo Kohata w/Takakura Ken. #18 in the series. VHS=Toei

That's it for this series. Titles with no story description and/or star appraisal are films I haven't seen. Likewise, pix below missing same.

AKUMYO (A BAD REPUTATION) 1961 84 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/ Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya. #1 in a series with Shintaro as a young, rowdy but decent roughneck trying to get along in various "endeavors" after the war. Paired with his best buddy, matinee-idol handsome, but naive Tamiya and sometimes his girlfriend. Usually involved with street peddling (food, clothes, black market items), he and his pals often rub up against violent and unprincipled opposition (Yakuza). I'll talk about this series in more detail in future issues of ATC (when I do a multi-part piece on Katsu).

*** 1/2 VHS=Daiel

ZOKU AKUMYO (RETURN OF A BAD REPUTATION) 1961 83 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu #2 in the series

*** VHS=Daiel

SHIN AKUMYO (ANOTHER BAD REPUTATION or A NEW BAD REPUTATION STORY) 1962 99 Min. Dir. Issai Mori w/Shintaro Katsu #3 in the series.

*** 1/2 VHS=Daiel

ZOKU - SHIN AKUMYO (RETURN OF THE NEW BAD REPUTATION) 1962 89 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya #4 in the series. VHS=Daiel

DAISAN NO AKUMYO (BAD REPUTATION OF THE THIRD) 1963 88 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu. #5 in the series. VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO ICHIBA (BAD REPUTATION IN THE MARKETPLACE) 1963 89 Min. Dir. Issai Mori w/Shintaro Katsu. #6 in the series. VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO HATOBIA (BAD REPUTATION AT THE WHARF) 1963 92 Min. Dir. Issai Mori w/Shintaro Katsu. #7 in the series. VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO ICHIBAN (BAD REPUTATION - FIRST AND THE BEST) 1963 91 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu. #8 in the series. VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO DAIKO (BAD REPUTATION - THE BIG DRUM) 1964 85 Min. Dir. Issai Mori w/Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya. #9 in the series. VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO 1965 81 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu. #10 in the series. VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO MUTEKI (BAD REPUTATION - INVINCIBLE) 1965 83 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya, Kaoru Yachigusa. #11 in the series.

*** 1/2 VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO SAKURA (BAD REPUTATION - CHERRY TREE) 1966 85 Min. Dir. Tokuzo Tanaka w/Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya, Etsuko Ichihara. #12 in the series.

*** 1/2 VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO ICHIDAI (LIFE OF BAD REPUTATION) 1967 84 Min. Dir. Kimiyoshi

Yasuda w/Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya, Mitsuko Mori. #13 in the series.

** ½ VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO JUCHACHIBAN (BAD REPUTATION NUMBER EIGHTEEN) 1968 86 Min. Dir Issai Mori w/Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya. #14 in the series. VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO ICHIBAN SHOBU (BAD REPUTATION - SHOWDOWN OF THE BEST) 1969 95 Min. Dir Makino Masahiro w/Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya. #15 in the series. VHS=Daiel

AKUMYO NAWABARI ARASHI (BAD REPUTATION - STORM OF THE ENCLOSURE or RAGE IN A CAGE or STORM INSIDE THE RING) 1974 104 Min. Dir. Yasuzo Masumura w/Shintaro Katsu, Jiro Tamiya. This series was apparently very popular, running through 1974 and 18 films. All were for Daiel except the last one -- Daiel went bankrupt in 1970, although they seem to have resurfaced in the eighties and nineties to release all their classics on video. I imagine the last film probably went over to Toho as that's what happened with the last few films in Katsu's much better (in fact, excellent) Daiel series, **ZATOICHI, THE BLIND SWORDSMAN**. #18 in the series.

AKA TOBOU TO "SEX" NO KIROKU (RECORD OF FILTHY ESCAPE INTO SEX)

W/Noboru Ando. Thoroughly trashy story - supposedly based on fact as there's newsreel footage of the guy Noboru's portraying at the close of the film. It's about a hitman and a couple of his henchmen. Killer Noboru, when not killing for hire, is seducing several mistresses (groupies) all over the city, some of whom keep press clippings of his crimes pinned up on the wall. When the one girl who really cares about him turns him in, he holes up in a hillside mansion with his pals. A shootout ensues and he's captured. On the way to the slammer, he masturbates beneath his shirttail, much to the consternation of his police captors. Bizarre.

*** VHS=Toei

ANDOH GUMIGAIKEN - HITOKIRI SHA OTOTO (REPORT ON THE EVIL DARK GANG - YOUNGER BROTHER'S MURDER) Dir. Sadao Nakajima w/ Bunta Sugawara, Noboru Ando, Tatsuo Umemiya, Tsunehiko Watase. Begins with lone Bunta being beaten to a bloody pulp

by Umemiya and cohorts. Noboru, a local gang-lord who oversees several gangs run by his blood brothers, does a voice-over narration at certain points, undoubtedly relating the sadistic foibles of his maniacal underlings. Watase and Bunta are both too arrogant for their own good and before long, Watase gets his arm cut off in a bloody fight in the rain. Bunta avenges, killing the male/female couple responsible. We get to see Watase in one more scene where, despite his one arm, he rapes his girl after she tries to help him tie his tie. Jeaz, what a grouch! Well, as Bunta grows more powerful under Noboru, the feud worsens between Bunta and Umemiya. At one point, Bunta gets shot, gets sewed up by a doctor, then goes to the bar where he'd last been. He puffs out some bloody stitches and some guts (?), plunks em down on the bar and rubs Umemiya's barmaid girlfriend's face in it!!! Whaw! Well, before long all get busted together. Once out of jail, Bunta takes a kinder, gentler view of life, tracks down his abandoned girlfriend and seems to be settling down when he's stabbed by four guys. I can usually tell what's happening despite my minimal Japanese, but unfortunately I found it pretty hard to tell who has had Bunta offed -- we haven't seen his killers before. Is it Umemiya, even though he hasn't been around since he was arrested? Or could it be Noboru, firing of his under-bosses' public displays of violence? Anyway, a swaggering anarchic tale of brutality and chaos. Nakajima bathes almost a third of the interiors in a flickering, unnatural blue light that adds to the unreality of the proceedings.

*** ½ VHS=Toei

ANKOKU GAI NO-ME (YOUNG MEN OF THE STREET OF DARKNESS or YOUNG MEN IN THE UNDERWORLD) I was unable to romanize either the director or any of the actors/actresses. Sometimes gritty, sometimes silly story of various teenagers involved with methedrine-dealing gangsters and the mysterious private eye out to stop them. Some strange studies ambience, especially at the beginning when one of our heroes -- the sub-'n-the wearin' guitarist of a Ventures-type combo -- watches a kid go into drug convulsions on the dance floor and die.

** VHS=Toho

ANKOKU GAI O DOURI (MAIN STREET OF THE UNDERWORLD) 1962 103 Min. Dir. Umaji Inoue w/Takakura Ken, Tatsuo Umemiya. So-so tale of woe in gangsterland. Begins with Ken

getting shot, drive-by style under the opening credits, then flashes back to the how-n-why of it happening.

** 1/2 VHS=Toei

ANKOKU GAI SAIDAI NO KETTOU (DUEL OF THE UNDERWORLD'S GREATEST or DUEL OF THE GREATEST ON A DARK STREET) 1969 101 Min. Dir. Umeji Inoue w/Takakura Ken, Minoru Oki VHS=Toei

ANKOKU GAI SAIGO NO HI (SUN BEHIND THE UNDERWORLD or SUN BEHIND THE DARKEST STREET) 1962 104 Min. Dir. Umeji Inoue w/Koji Tsuruta, Takakura Ken, Rentarō Mikuni, Tetsuro Tambe. Exciting nightclub shootout at end where numerous main characters bite the dust except for Ken and Mikuni.

*** VHS=Toei

Tetsuro Tambe



ANKOKU GAI NO GANEKI (UNDERWORLD'S WAR DECLARATION or WAR DECLARATION ON A DARK STREET) 1969 102 Min. Dir. Kihachi Okamoto w/Toshiro Mifune, Koji Tsuruta. VHS=Toho

ANKOKU GAI NO TAIKETSU (UNDERWORLD CONFRONTATION or CONFRONTATION ON A DARK STREET) 1960 95 Min. Dir. Kihachi Okamoto w/Toshiro Mifune, Koji Tsuruta. Melodramatic tale of special operative (Mifune) tracking down criminals who've stolen a shipment of weapons. Tsuruta helps Mifune out. Lots of cony humor that would later be typical of the James Bond films (though, surprisingly enough, this is pre-Bond). Strange too, in that Okamoto's samurai films, especially **SWORD OF DOOM** and **SAMURAI ASSASSIN** are

extremely bleak, grim and brutal. This one is much more 'light entertainment'.

** 1/2 VHS=Toho

ANKOKU GAI NO DANKON (BULLETHOLES IN THE UNDERWORLD or BULLETHOLES IN THE DARK STREET) 1961 73 Min. Dir. Kihachi Okamoto w/Yuzou Kiyama. VHS=Toho. Just a note: **ANKOKU GAI** seems to be the saying for, or equivalent of, the English language expression 'underworld'; lest I be mistaken in one of these cases, I've included both interpretations.

BAKUCHIUCHI - SOCHO TOBAKU (BIG TIME GAMBLING BOSS aka PRIVATE GAMBLING - GAMBLING LEADER TRIBUTE or GAMBLING HELL - GAMBLING LEADER TRIBUTE) 1988 96 Min. Dir. Yamashita Kosaku w/Koji Tsuruta. VHS=Toei

BAKUTO - GAI JIN BUTAI (GAMBLER - OUTSIDE FORCES) Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/Koji Tsuruta, Tomisaburo (Mr. Lone Wolf/Baby Cart) Wakayama. Tough, unsentimental, ironic, brutal, violent.

*** 1/2 stars VHS=Toei

BAKUTO - KAISANSHIKI (GAMBLER - STYLE OF DISSOLUTION) Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/Koji Tsuruta, Tetsuro Tambe. Koji returns after jail term time to resume control of a dock workers' union. Of course, he's also a gambler and so are many of his blue collar pals. Tambe plays a dissolute ne'er-do-well from out of the head Yakuza clan's past. Koji'd like to chuck all the aggravation that begins with the death of the clan leader (the new guy's a greedy, two-faced mo-to) and take off with his gal (he had rescued her from some raping U.S. soldiers in postwar times). Anyway, things are a bit talky, but Fukasaku, as usual keeps up our interest. At the end, Koji goes to the new head-guy's office, casually locks all the doors, tosses him a knife and challenges him to a death duel. They fight in silence, Koji wins but his victory is bittersweet. He's just missed the boat on which his gal's set sail. For some reason, Fukasaku has all the flashbacks in a bright lime-green.

*** VHS=Toei

BAKUTO - KIRIKOMI TAI (GAMBLER - CUTTING DOWN ANYONE IN HIS PATH) Dir. Junya Sato w/Koji Tsuruta.

*** VHS=Toei

BAKUTO ICHIDAI - CHIMATSURI FUDO (GAMBLER'S LIFE - UNSTOPPABLE FESTIVAL OF BLOOD) 1969 Dir. Kimiyoshi Yasuda w/Raizo Ichikawa. One of Ichikawa's last two films - he made only two in 1969 (or were they only released in 1969?), the other being his last outing as the renegade halfbreed samurai, Kyoshiro Nemun in the mindblowing NEMURI KYOSHIRO AKUJO GARI (HUNTING EVIL WOMEN). Don't know much else about this except for the title, director and a couple of photos. Ichikawa also played a young Yakuza boss in Daii Films' WAKAI OYABUN (YOUNG BOSS) series. BAKUTO ICHIDAI doesn't seem to be on videotape or laser.

BORYOKUDAN (VIOLENT GANG) 1963 86 Min. Dir. Shigehiro Ozawa w/Koji Tsuruta. VHS=Toei

BORYOKUDAN SAI BUSO (VIOLENT GANG RE-ARMS) Dir. Junya Sato w/Koji Tsuruta, Tetsuro Tamba, Tomisaburo Wakayama. Koji is the leader of a dock workers' union, Wakayama, the boss of the workers and Tamba the Yakuza boss who makes everyone's life Hell. This would be down another half-notch if it wasn't for the terrific cast and super-violent, downbeastending. After Wakayama's murdered, Koji confronts Tamba and the big boss in a shootout, workers back him up until he's the only one left, then start stoning him, too! They're stupid ingrates because he truly gives a shit and ends up committing *han-kari* on dockside to prove it.

*** VHS=Toei

BORYOKUKIN SUJI (PROFIT FROM VIOLENCE) Dir. Sadao Nakajima w/Hiroki Matsukata, Tatsuo Umemiya, Tetsuro Tamba. Hiroki is an ex-boxer reduced to skinning cats with his paws to make take fur. He also goes around with an old drunk mentor extorting large sums of money by creating noisy disturbances at corporation offices or shareholder's meetings and refusing to leave unless paid. There are actually Yakuza thugs who do this in real life Japan! Anyway, Hiroki and the old guy as well as their pal, Umemiya get in trouble with a more established gang. Lotsa boisterous humor with pathos as we get into the second half of the film. Weird cameo by Wakayama as a lecherous mob boss our 'heroes' set up in a blackmail/sex plot. Hiroki, in turn, gets set up when Wakayama's wife seduces him! Turns very bleak and ironic by the end.

*** VHS=Toei

BURAI YORI - KAMBU (VILLAINY - LEADING MEMBERS) 1968 83 Min. Dir. Toshio Masuda w/Wateri Tetsuya. This series is a bit of a rare bird in that it strikes a balance between the modern ultra-cruel, ultra-violent Yakuza films that were evolving at Toei in 1969-1979 time frame and the more romantic, traditional 'doomed hero' genre, best exemplified by the SHOWA ZAN KYODEN and NIHON KYOKAKUDEN series. It begins with a B&W prologue showing Goro (Wateri Tetsuya) as a child basically going through hell - his mother being rudely seduced by a Yakuza hoodlum, his little sister dying from an illness while he runs around the neighborhood in the midst of a storm vainly seeking help. He steals food from a peddler during post-war chaos, escapes from a reform school only to be abandoned by his older companion as soon as they're a few meters outside the barbed wire. Dissolve to the present where he confronts a friend (Kyoosuke Machida) who is shooting up another friend's bar, Wateri wounding Machida with a knife and being carted off to prison. The scene where the cops haul him away is classic: his gal crying softly as she promises to wait for him, then the stabbed buddy's girl getting in his face to swear revenge. Once he's out, the usual downward spiral of unlucky chance encounters and hoodlum companions begins to take its toll in somewhat talky, though poignant sequences as well as ultra-violent knife fights. #1 in the series.

**** VHS=Nikkatsu

Wateri Tetsuya



KANBU - BURAI (LEADING MEMBERS - VILLAIN) 1968 87 Min. Dir. Keiichi Kozawa w/Watari Tetsuya. More incredibly choreographed black leather knife fights, especially long drawn out climax which is a mindblower. #2 in the series.

**** VHS=Nikkatsu

BURAI HIBOJO (VILLAIN - BAD FEELING) 1968 92 Min. w/Watari Tetsuya. #3 in the series. VHS=Nikkatsu

BURAI - HITOKIRI GORO (VILLAIN - GORO'S WICKED SWORD) 1968 88 min. Dir. Keiichi Kozawa w/Watari Tetsuya. #4 in the series. VHS=Nikkatsu

BURAI - KOKU BIKUBI (VILLAIN - AFRAID OF THE DARK) 1968 86 Min. Dir. Keiichi Kozawa w/Watari Tetsuya. #5 in the series. VHS=Nikkatsu

BURAI - KOROSE (VILLAIN - MURDEROUS) 1968 86 Min. Dir. Keiichi Kozawa w/Watari Tetsuya. #6 in the series. VHS=Nikkatsu

DAI KANBU - KERI O TSUKERO 1970 83 Min. Dir. Keiichi Kozawa w/Watari Tetsuya. It's hard to say what this film's place is in the overall saga since I haven't seen BURAI #'s 3,4,5,6. I can only suppose it represents some type of climax. Despite the simple story, it's a good one. Our tale begins with Watari making love to a young lady, getting dressed, picking up his knife, then jumping out the window to keep his appointment with destiny. First thing in the morning - Vendetta time! He meets his pal and they rendezvous with some bigwigs in a remote vacant lot. A knife fight ensues and then, a prison term. When Tetsuya gets out he plots a vengeance caper to rob the clan who wronged him. He uses his buddies and gal to help him. It goes off OK, but the Yakuza guys find out who's who and start picking up his friends one-by-one, torturing and killing them. Nihilistic violence ends things on a downbeat. #7.

**** VHS=Nikkatsu

CHOEKI JUNHACHI NEN KARI SHUTSOGOKU (HIS DISCHARGE FROM PRISON AFTER EIGHTEEN YEAR TERM) Dir. Yasuo Kihata w/Noboru Ando. Noboru gets out of jail and, with his deaf mute pal, plans a nefarious caper involving the U.S. Army. *** VHS=Toei

DODE KAI YATSU - KENKA ICHIDAI 1970 87 Min. Dir. Kazuo Ikehiro w/Shintaro Katsu. Ko Nishimura Has it's moments but somewhat disappointing considering the director and Katsu's involvement. Boisterous lone wolf tough (Katsu) who's idolized by strange DODES KA DEN-type community residing in junkyard (who are about to be evicted because of the Conglomerate's plan for constructing a building complex). Seems a bit sentimental at times, but then again, the version I saw was an atrociously pan-and-scanned, butchered, commercial ridden mess from Japanese TV so maybe it deserves another 1/2* in my rating.

** VHS=Daiei

FURYO BANCHO SERIES - Not that it's a masterpiece by any stretch of the imagination, but I would've liked to have supplied more information on this anarchist-comedy-action series featuring a 'bosozoku' gang or 'hot rod gang'. These gangs, along with the Yakuza, really exist. Bosozoku are younger than Yakuza (usually) and, despite their appellation, ride motorcycles, not hot rods. This series started in 1968 and ran through 11 films, I think, before they gave up the ghost circa 1972. Much of the humor is crude and occasionally scatological. The action and/or violence, as well as the sixties fashions (sometimes cool looking black leather, other times, tasteless plaids and plastics) are on the level of stylized cartoons. Because I could not get access to the book where most of this information comes from, I'm not sure of other titles or the order of the films I do mention.

FURYO BANCHO (DEPRAVED YOUTH) 1968 w/Tatsuo Umemiya #1 in the series. VHS=Toei

FURYO BANCHO TEH w/Tatsuo Umemiya Pirate-bike apocalypse. Very funny blackmail/extortion plot of a lower Yakuza boss (his passion pit bed is a funky miniature roman galleon/gondola, floating in an oversized Japanese bath) backfires, leading the guys into open war with the Yakuza gang (including mortars, grenades etc...). Featuring one of the strangest female impersonators you'll ever see. *** VHS=Toei

FURYO BANCHO - YACHI SUBU TAKURI Dir. Yukio Noda w/Tatsuo Umemiya. ** VHS=Toei

FURYO BANCHO - OKURIFU 1969 w/Tatsuo Umemiya. ** #4 in the series. VHS=Toei

FURYO BANCHŌ - KUCHIKARA DEMAKASE

Dir. Yukio Noda w/Tatsuo Umemiya. The guys start off on a raft with their familiar skull 'n crossbones flag, come to an island inhabited by women and that's only the first ten minutes!

**½ VHS=Toei

FURYO BANCHŌ - HOMEMADE SHABURE Dir.

Yukio Noda w/Tatsuo Umemiya. The pirate-biker guys ditch a Yakuza gang in a porno theater and with the help of an interracial trio of trashy chicks, whose tits keep falling out of their dresses, steal the gang's already twice-stolen diamonds. Unfortunately, they hide in a tourist resort and it's downhill from there with bad situation comedy sketches. I think this might be the last of the series; it's certainly one of the worst.

#8 in the series.

**½ VHS=Toei

GENDAI YAKUZA (PRESENT DAY YAKUZA) --

Other than the first in this six film series, I'm not sure of the order of the following titles.

GENDAI YAKUZA - YOTAI MONO NO OKITE

(PRESENT DAY YAKUZA - LAW OF THE SHAMELESS YOUNG MAN) 1969 92 Min. Dir. Yasuo Kohata w/Bunta Sugawara, Ryosuke Machida. #1 in the series VHS=Toei

GENDAI YAKUZA - KETSU SAKURA SAN KYODAI (PRESENT DAY YAKUZA - THREE BLOOD BROTHERS OF THE CHERRY TREE)

Dir. Sadao Nakajima w/Bunta Sugawara, Takakura Ken

**½ VHS=Toei

GENDAI YAKUZA - YOTAI MONO JINGI (PRESENT DAY YAKUZA - SHAMELESS YOUNG MAN WREAKS HAVOC) Dir. Yasuo

Kohata w/Bunta Sugawara

**½ VHS=Toei

GENDAI YAKUZA - HITOKIRI YOTAI (PRESENT DAY YAKUZA - SHAMELESS HUMAN SACRIFICE or SHAMELESS YOUNG MAN'S MURDER) Dir. Kinji Fukasaku w/Bunta

Sugawara, Noboru Ando.

Awesome tale of Bunta doing his arrogant thing, trying to barnstorm into the rackets with his loyal few, but not vicious enough henchmen. He continues to mess up and is scolded, beaten and screwed over constantly by the bigger gangs. Noboru likes and admires Bunta

Noboru Ando



despite his big mouth. Bunta's girlfriend, at one point, takes a razor to the face of one of Bunta's one-night stands and the mayhem escalates. Before long, the other gangs have had enough. Bunta and pals are hiding in an abandoned building where the gang finds them and, in a last ditch effort, Bunta and buds all chop off their little fingers in venerable Yakuza style as apology. Not good enough. Noboru, who's trying to keep the others from killing Bunta, can't stop the death dealing. Bunta's gal, returning with groceries, sees him in the midst of the bad guys, pulls a knife and charges only to be stabbed. Bunta stabs those nearest him. Including Noboru, then is gunned down by the rest of the gang.

**** VHS=Toei

GENDAI YAKUZA - SAKAZUKI SHIMASU (PRESENT DAY YAKUZA - LOYALTY CUP OFFERINGS) 1971 86 Min. Dir. Kiyoshi Sasaki

w/Bunta Sugawara, Hiroki Matsukata

***½ VHS=Toei

There is one more film in the GENDAI YAKUZA series but I don't know the title.

{END PART ONE}

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